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JACOB

WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL.

BY

THE REV. G. D. KRUMMACHER,
AUTHOR OF
"ISRAEL'S WANDERINGS IN THE WILDERNESS."

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.



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SERMON I.

GENESIS XXXII. 24.

*And Jacob was left alone: and there wrestled
a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

THE verse we have just read, forms a part of one of the most wonderful narratives contained in the Holy Scriptures; and upon which we intend to meditate on this and some future occasions.

Strengthened and refreshed by the promise, "I will do thee good," the Patriarch Jacob, at the express command of his God, had removed from Haran, where for a long period he had served his uncle Laban, in order to return to his native land. This displeased Laban so much, that he went in pursuit of his son-in-law, and overtook him on Mount Gilead. His anger was inflamed against him to such a degree,

that he would certainly have done the Patriarch a serious injury : since he boasted that, with the help of God, he had power enough for that purpose, if God had not forbidden this Syrian, in a dream, to take heed not to speak otherwise than in a friendly manner to him ; although Rachel was, nevertheless, in peril of her life. At length every thing was amicably settled, and they parted in a peaceful and friendly manner. Laban turned back ; and whilst Jacob was proceeding on his journey, he was met, to his great comfort, by the angels of God. Thus pleasingly was he extricated from this trying situation.

Scarcely, however, had he been rescued from this danger, than he fell into another of a much more serious nature. The fury of his brother Esau, and his threat, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I slay my brother Jacob," had compelled the latter to seek his safety in flight. When he returned into Esau's neighbourhood, his first concern was to gain his favour. He attempted to accomplish this by sending messengers to him ; who, in the humblest terms, were to endeavour to secure his good will. But they soon returned with the

intelligence, that his brother Esau was coming to meet him, with four hundred men. "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed;" and that with reason: for what other intentions could Esau have than such as were hostile? And what had Jacob to oppose to such a host? Nothing; not even flight. What a distressing and helpless situation! O God, into what painful circumstances dost thou sometimes suffer thy favourites to fall; and yet it is only for the attainment of the most blessed ends.

Jacob's anxiety, however, is not so great as to deprive him of all reflection; although his confidence in God is not lively enough to render him as courageous as a young lion. He makes such prudent arrangements, that the possibility of escape is afforded to one part, should the other be destroyed by Esau. Nor did he neglect any thing which seemed likely to reconcile Esau, and win his heart: to which several considerable presents, which he prepared for that purpose, were intended to contribute.

But the pious Patriarch did not let the matter rest there; he did not ground his confidence upon these arrangements, but upon God. In the midst of his anxious preparations, he applied

to Him by earnest prayer, which emanated from the depth of his distress. He appears openly before his covenant God; he frankly confesses his fears, and does not conceal his wretchedness; he thanks Him for all his former undeserved benefits; he bows himself in deep humility; he cleaves by faith to the command and gracious promise of the Lord, "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good;" he cleaves to the power and goodness of God, and beseeches Him to deliver him. He passed a sleepless night in making the arrangements he thought necessary; and conducted his flocks, his family, and his people over the brook Jabbok.

He was then left entirely alone: which he preferred, as being the best suited for his state of mind at the time. He was desirous of pouring out his heart still more fully before the Lord; of praying still more fervently; of pressing to the throne of Grace, unhindered by external things, at a time when he required help. The good hand of God which was extended over him, drew him into this retirement, because it had something great and particular in view with him.

It was night: a season calculated in itself to excite a feeling of awe. The heavens above

him, with their countless stars, reminded him of the promise given to his holy forefather, and sealed it to him also, that thus numerous should his descendants be. The gloomy earth was full of terrors to him, and Esau not far off; perhaps even very near. His help was solely in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. What a blessed night he had already once enjoyed, when sleeping in a desert with a stone beneath his head, and when heaven opened itself above him! But this was a night of anxious fear. It was not only night around the holy Patriarch, but it had also become dark in his soul. He was greatly afraid. This fear seemed to be justified by the circumstances in which he was placed: yet still it had its root in his want of faith; and if Christ blamed his disciples on account of the unbelieving fear which they manifested in the most imminent danger of death, Jacob was also deserving of a similar reproof on account of similar misconduct; although that must be an uncommon confidence, which can preserve us from fear under such appalling circumstances.

Jacob was manifestly, according to the expression of the Apostle, "not perfect in love;"

for the latter expels fear. Fear, however, proceeds more especially from an evil and defiled conscience. No sooner had Adam incurred the latter by his disobedience, than he was afraid, and fled from the face of God. A guilty conscience is like a dangerous and poisonous imposthume in the individual, which finally prepares him for the flames of hell, unless healed by the blood of Christ, the only remedy. This alone, appropriated by the power of the Holy Spirit, brings peace. Who does not know that Jacob was an object of God's love, and therefore also a partaker of this peace. But as the renovation of the children of God here upon earth is progressive, so this part of it is particularly so, and is more obvious when trying occasions and circumstances occur, than at other times. Besides which, God, as Moses says in Psalm xc., places, in the times of visitation, our transgressions before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance. He begins, at some after period, to reckon with his servants, and to set before their eyes what they have done; and then is fulfilled what is written in Psalm xcix. 8, "Thou answeredst them, thou forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their

inventions." They are perhaps not sufficiently aware of the greatness of the guilt; its abominable and culpable nature, and the aggravating circumstances which attend it. They have not been rendered sufficiently contrite, humble, and heart-broken on account of it; they have not sufficiently accused themselves before God because of it; they have been desirous of excusing, if not of justifying themselves in some measure: their hatred to sin is perhaps not sufficiently powerful; their desire for deliverance, and their gratitude on account of it, not sufficiently ardent. They must be made to ascend higher, and to descend deeper. Their self-knowledge is to receive an addition, and their view of the real nature, extent, necessity, and preciousness of Divine grace, to become brighter. Their conscience is to be rendered more tender, their walk more circumspect, their looking unto the Lord more fixed, their abiding in Him and His abiding in them more intimate; and themselves, generally speaking, more fit for every good work, by faith in Christ Jesus. The potter takes the clay into his forming hand, and purifies and ennobles it from one degree to another. The path of the child of

God is from faith to faith, from strength to strength. The fruitfulness which was at first but thirty-fold, becomes sixty-fold, and the latter hundred-fold. In the blade the ear is formed ; the latter shoots pleasingly forth from its envelopement, and fills itself with corn, which ripens in the sunshine and the storm. The child becomes a youth, the youth a man and a father in Christ ; in whom, as the Head, they all grow together in all things. Such is the conduct of the Father with his elect, whom he has chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that they might be holy and without blame before him in love ; and such was the path by which he led Jacob whom he loved.

Something had occurred in the life of this Patriarch, which was out of order, and this was the blessing of his father. Isaac intended to have bestowed it upon Esau ; but with the assistance of his mother, who gave the preference to Jacob, even as Isaac strangely did to Esau, he deprived Esau of the blessing intended for him, and procured its bestowment upon himself. We know the artful manner in which this was accomplished, and how the old blind patriarch was deceived, who took Jacob for Esau, and

blessed him instead of the latter. It is true that the blessing descended upon him for whom God had intended it. For before the children were born, and had done neither good nor evil, it was said to Rebecca, the elder shall serve the younger, in order "that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him that calleth, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." It is true also, that Isaac, on afterwards learning the real state of the case, instead of retracting his blessing, confirmed it, and did not suffer a single word of disapprobation to fall, respecting the manner in which he had been deceived and imposed upon. But deception continues to be deception, and consequently sinful and not to be excused but reprov'd, in whatever cause it may be employed. Some indeed, with the venerable Luther at their head, have not only excused the mode of acting of Rebecca and her son, but have even justified and defended it as the consequence of a noble faith. Jacob, however, did not regard it in this light, but was apprehensive, lest by such conduct he should have inherited a curse instead of a blessing from his father; and when his mother endeavoured to

pacify him by saying, "Upon me be thy curse, my son!" it is evident she means nothing by it, and is a proof that she was unable to make a proper reply. To defend such a transaction, is in reality only to maintain the abominable position, that the end sanctifies the means. But this is certain, that God never fails of, attaining his aim, and that even the improper conduct of individuals must promote the accomplishment of his purposes. Yet these improprieties are not thereby justified; otherwise the curse on account of the crucifixion of Christ, would have unjustly adhered to the Jews to the present day. "Shall we do evil, that good may come? God forbid!" The condemnation of those who act from such a motive is just.

Those words in Psalm l. are often verified, "These things hast thou done and I kept silence: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." Jacob's conduct in that affair now seemed ready to avenge itself upon him, and he might be apprehensive of the curse, respecting which he had previously so easily satisfied himself with the unmeaning words of his mother. How easily might such thoughts as the following occur to

him : ‘ Thy father did not in reality bless thee, but Esau, his first born, for whom thou didst give thyself out. The blessing has no reference to thee. Thou art a deceiver, and that of the basest kind. Although thou hast imposed upon thy venerable father, and abused his lamentable blindness, which ought to have induced thee to act with the greatest sincerity : yet the eye of God has only been the more acutely fixed upon thee ; thou hast been unable to deceive Him. Thou art a deceiver ; thou art worthy of death ! And lo ! Esau, who was blessed in thy person, is now coming against thee with four hundred men, to execute, as a servant of Divine justice, the sentence of death upon thee ! Thou oughtest to have acknowledged, confessed, and made reparation for thy fault. The long-restrained wrath of God is awaking over thee. It is now too late. How couldst thou dare, how could such a man as thou venture to suppose, that God had said to thee, “ I will do thee good.” Wilt thou make God the minister of sin, by supposing that he will be gracious to such a wretch as thou art ? The Devil must have been justly permitted to suggest such pleasing thoughts to thee, in order

he more infallibly to destroy thee. Instead of making the commencement with repentance, thou hast imagined thyself, to thy own injury, in a state of grace. It will now be proved. Esau—what a noble character he is, compared with thee ! He has threatened thee with death ; and what else dost thou deserve at his hands ? Hast thou not most basely endeavoured to rob and murder him, by cunningly stealing the blessing intended for, and in reality pronounced upon him ? “ Be Lord over thy brother ! ” it was said in the blessing, which thou didst so unjustly seek to appropriate to thyself. Dost thou not now evidently see who has experienced the fulfilment of it ? Thou, a poor servant ; he, a lord with four hundred men ; and thou entirely in his hand, O thou poor deceived Jacob ! Where is there a poorer man than thou ? And he lifted up his voice and wept bitterly.’

And are you, my friends, entirely unacquainted with trials of this kind ? I can scarcely suppose it, unless you are novices in the Christian course. You have put on the armour. Until you are at liberty to put it off, many things may occur, of which it is unnecessary now to

speaking in detail. Let this suffice; if you are children, call upon the Father, who without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work. Therefore pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. If you are children, you will not be without chastisement; and the dearer the child the sharper the discipline. David once said when it went well with him, "I shall never be moved;" for the Lord, in his mercy, had made his mountain to stand strong. But no sooner did he hide his face than he was troubled. Therefore be not high-minded, but humble. Be not self-confident, but take heed lest thou fall, whilst thinking thou art standing. Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Build thy house upon the rock, and take heed lest thou regard that as a rock, which is not so in reality. And though it be the rock, yet remember how easily thou mayest build wood and stubble upon it, which the fire will destroy. If it be genuine gold, it must still pass through the fire. For the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. "Thy filthiness is so abominable," it is said in Ezekiel xxiv. 13, "that although I have purged thee, yet thou

wast not cleansed, therefore thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee."

The holy Patriarch wrestled in faith with the temptations above-mentioned, and prayed, or at least wished to do so, and to hold converse with the Lord. The following was probably his train of thought and anxious inquiry: 'Art thou then really my God and Father, or art thou so no longer? Have I deceived myself in firmly believing, that notwithstanding all my unworthiness, thou lovest me, that I might be so much the more to the praise of the glory of thy grace, after seeing and tasting it, and when I loved and praised thee on account of it? Certainly it can never be. But the feeling of it is now so much obscured, and so doubtful, that I can no longer rejoice in it; especially now, in this my time of trouble, when I so particularly need it. O look upon me therefore in mercy, and cause thy face to shine! Cast a friendly ray into my darkness.'

In this manner probably he prayed: "And there wrestled a man with him." Wonderful occurrence! What terror must it have inspired! Jacob justly thought himself quite

alone. All at once he suddenly feels himself laid hold of by some one. Who it is he knows not; he is only conscious that it is not a wild beast seeking to devour him, but a man. This man does not appear to be his friend, but his foe—perhaps one of Esau's four hundred men. Whoever it is, he struggles with him. He lays hold of the terrified patriarch in such a manner as if he would either push him away from his place, or throw him upon the ground. Jacob defends himself; he grasps his antagonist, whom he does not yet know, and refuses either to move from the spot, or to let himself be thrown down. He exerts all his strength, and the conflict lasts "until the breaking of the day."

Who was this man? Jacob did not know at first; but by degrees it became apparent to him who he was. If we form an opinion of him from the circumstance of his seeing that "he prevailed not against Jacob," we shall think very differently of him on reading what immediately follows:—"he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint," for to this, a more than human power is requisite. When he says, "Let me go," he appears inferior to Jacob, and de-

pendent upon him. But when Jacob entreats his blessing—he exalts him far above him, and even above his father Isaac, who had already blessed him in the name of God. When the man gives him the name of Israel, and explains to him the meaning of that appellation, by telling him with whom he had been wrestling, and over whom he has prevailed—“with God and with men”—every veil falls away, and the man presents himself to us in his true form. Although he declines mentioning his name, in reply to Jacob’s simple question, yet he reveals it the more clearly by the act of “his blessing him there.” But when the sun arose in Jacob’s comprehension, upon the whole affair, he called the place Peniel; “for,” said he, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

‘Extraordinary occurrence! Who can fathom it?’ What! does this appear so strange to you, although you have seen the Son of man under such entirely different circumstances? Remember that it was predicted of old, that His name should be called “Wonderful.”

This man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. This man had for a time, assumed a human body, in order to wrestle

with Jacob bodily. He seized him with his hands, and held him fast with his arms, in order to expel him from the place, or else throw him upon the ground. Can we suppose that complete silence was observed during the conflict; and that nothing more was spoken than what we find recorded? We can scarcely imagine it. But may we venture to fill up the gap which Moses has left here, by our own suppositions, if they are religious, founded on the word of God, and conformable to faith and experience? Why should we not? It is at least certain, that if any thing was spoken during the struggle, it was nothing consolatory and encouraging on the part of the angel of God; but in character with the act of wrestling, which was no token of friendship. But what is it that the Spirit discovers to the individual, and with which he upbraids him? Is it not his sin? And had Jacob no sin? Might it not have been said to him, 'Away with thee from this holy place where angels linger!' Might not the whole catalogue of his guilt have been unfolded to him in all its particulars; and might it not have been most clearly proved to him, that in himself there did not seem the

slightest ground for that love which God had toward him; but that it must be sought and found in quite a different place? In this way, in a spiritual manner also, his hip might have been disjoined, and the last idea of his own worthiness, &c. destroyed. If Satan upbraids a soul with sins; if he appears at the right hand of a Joshua in unclean garments, to accuse him; we are well aware what his intentions are—to distress, to plunge into immoderate grief, to cast into despair, and entirely to destroy. But the Son of God does not act thus. He does it only to humble us, and to allure us to himself, in order afterwards to comfort us the more. How did he act towards Saul? Did he not call out to him, “Thou persecutest *me*?” How towards Peter? Did he not thrice inquire if he loved him? How did he conduct himself towards the Syrophenician woman? Did he not almost call her a dog? And did not the angels of the seven churches receive almost all of them a particular and emphatic reproof? We know for what purpose. As soon as Paul perceived that Satan had his hand in the matter, he advised the Corinthians to comfort and forgive the sinners.

amongst them so much the more, that they might not sink into excessive sorrow, and be over-reached by Satan.

If the angel of God wrestled with Jacob, the latter struggled also with all his might with God, or acted as a prince towards him. He would by no means let himself be moved away from his place, but resisted with all his strength, both bodily and spiritual. Tears and prayers were the most powerful and victorious weapons with which he wrestled with and overcame the Son of God. 'Upbraid me,'—will have been his prayerful language, amidst a flood of tears,—'upbraid me with all my sins; unfold and develop them in all their odiousness; reveal to me each aggravating circumstance; shew me my whole desert. I grant it all, I do not excuse, cloak, or palliate any thing. But this I tell thee also, I do not stand here on my own righteousness, for I have none; but rely upon thy mercy. Art thou, yea, art thou not thyself, however hostile may be thy position towards me—art not thou thyself JEHOVAH ZIDKENU, the Lord my righteousness? Is there the slightest spot, wrinkle, or blemish in it? Was my forefather Abraham justified by his

works—was he not by thy grace? No; thou wilt never reject the poor sinner who takes refuge with thee. Hast thou not given thy word upon it, that thou art not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance? Wilt thou begin with me to invalidate thine own word? Thy truth and faithfulness will not suffer this. Thy great mercy itself presents me with weapons against thy justice.'

In this, or a similar manner, the fight of faith is carried on. Secretly and imperceptibly all kinds of suitable weapons are handed to the warrior, even as to the Canaanitish woman the suitable reply, "Yea, Lord, but the dogseat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table," by which she set Jesus fast—so to speak—and obliged him to yield the victory to her.

The conflict was violent and lasted long, even "until the breaking of the day." The longer it lasted the more profound were the views which the struggling patriarch received of his corruption, and the grounds of his faith. The longer it lasted, the humbler and weaker he became, the more compelled to build every thing on mere mercy, and entirely despair of himself: to which a circumstance—the dislo-

cating of his hip, which we shall afterwards consider—greatly contributed. For the present, we will break off with the intention of taking an early opportunity of considering the result.

My hearers will doubtless have already been able to make their observations and useful application of the subject. The chiefest of these is, See to it, that you build the house of your hope upon the rock, that it may stand firm when assaulted. So much is certain, that Jacob hazarded too much, when at his mother's words, "the curse be upon me," he exposed himself to the danger. He ought to have had very different reasons for so doing. Rebecca, indeed, was certain of her cause; but this was not sufficient for her son. Do not mimic others, nor rejoice in the light of another. It is in ourselves that we must be regenerated, experience Divine influence, and be sealed with the Spirit of promise, for godliness does not consist in words, but in power.

May those that are inwardly assaulted, also learn from Jacob's conflict, an appropriate demeanour in the attacks upon their confidence and their hope. Expect them, but do not flee

from them ; at least no where but to Jesus ! Ask boldly, even when it seems as if he would drive you from the place. Lay hold of the promises ; strive with them against the threatenings ; weep and supplicate, even though he seem to be himself opposed to you. May he strengthen us for this purpose ! Amen.

SERMON II.

GENESIS XXXII. 25.

And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh ; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him.

“ I KNOW, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” This confession is made by the writer of cxixth Psalm, in the seventy-fifth verse. In the sixty-seventh, he had said, “ Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word.” The word afflicted implies being distressed, agonized, rendered poor and wretched, in consequence of which the individual is deprived of all presumption and boldness, and feels humbled and abased. That which produced this effect upon the Psalmist, he calls

the judgments of the Lord—that is, siftings and trials, which, though painful to the feelings, are salutary in their results, and he ascribes these afflictive events to the Lord; since, without his will, not a hair can fall from our heads. He calls them right or just, and is therefore far from believing any wrong has been done him; on the contrary he thinks there is sufficient reason existing for his being thus afflicted. He acknowledges, that it is *in faithfulness* that the Lord has afflicted him, in order that he might fulfil his promises in him—not in wrath, for the purpose of destroying him, which he probably apprehended when under the pressure; *in faithfulness*, that thus he might bestow upon him the most glorious blessings; although it seemed to him at the time that he was being led to destruction; *in faithfulness*, in order to heal him of his many infirmities; whilst his iniquities pressed hard upon him, and unrighteousness seemed to have increasingly the upper hand of him; *in faithfulness*, since he secretly held him fast and supported him; for though the Lord lays a burthen upon us, he also helps us to bear it; whilst he at one time thought the Lord was no longer his

help ; but then again perceived the hand of the Most High ; *in faithfulness*, as long as it was needful to abase him, however much he might pray, cry, sigh, and complain against it, and say, “ Is thy mercy clean gone for ever ? ” but not a moment longer did the time of suffering last, and then appeared his powerful aid. The Lord afflicted him *in faithfulness* to the degree which was requisite, so that he went bowed down, and bent beneath it, and the burden continued to increase until it became too heavy to be borne ; but that very moment it was changed in such a wonderful manner, that it might be said, “ Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercy ; whilst even under his burden he also thought he should yet praise him ; *faithful* in attacking him just on that side where it certainly pained him the most, but where it was also the most necessary ; although he might probably think, Ah, if it were only any thing else but that ; and yet just that was requisite for him, whilst something different was required for other patients. In short, it is *in faithfulness* that God afflicts and humbles his children. Formerly they went

astray, and, with the best will and intention, began the work improperly; but their conduct is now conformable to the rule of the word. Certainly, he that has already passed through the furnace, may boast and declare the judgments of the Lord to be right. Let us be satisfied that we have an unspeakably faithful Lord and Master; and may this also become more apparent to us from the meditation we are at present about to resume on the subject. .

We proceed with the consideration of Jacob's conflict, and its results; after having, on a former occasion, made ourselves somewhat more acquainted with the two combatants.

"When the Son of God saw that he could not prevail over him"—such is the continuation of the wonderful narrative—victory declared itself for Jacob, and the Son of God is obliged to yield! Nor is this any wonder, since he had bound his own hands by the promise, "I will do thee good;" and thereby pointed out to his Omnipotence the direction it ought to take. It was able to clear away those things which were a hindrance to Jacob, but not to accelerate his destruction; it was able to pour out benefits upon him, but not divest him of them.

Omnipotence is the minister of Divine truth, and could do nothing against, but every thing for the truth. It could have rent heaven and earth asunder ; but it was under the necessity of preserving Jacob unconsumed. Omnipotence is a Divine attribute, the exercise of which depends upon the will of God, who can therefore exert or restrain it at his pleasure. But with his truth the case is different ; for it is a constituent part of his being, and it is impossible for him to act contrary to it, or he would cease to be Jehovah—that is, to be what he is. He has often entirely renounced his Omnipotence ; so that nothing but weakness was visible in him. Where was his Omnipotence, when he fled into Egypt before the face of Herod ? What—is this the man who intends to save his people ? Is this he who is to overcome the strong man armed, and bind him ? Is this the child who is the mighty God ? Where was his Omnipotence, when he was bound, and nailed hand and foot to the cross, and when he was laid in the sepulchre ? He still indeed possessed it ; but he restrained it for the truth's sake, as he himself says, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. There was a necessity for

it ; for Omnipotence cannot be exercised against the truth, since God is willing to employ it only in favour of the truth. He had said of his sheep, "No man shall pluck them out of my hands ;" the power of God was therefore obliged to be immediately exerted, when it seemed as if Jesus's assertion was about to be put to shame in the case of Peter, who denied his Master even with oaths and curses ; the Lord then turned and looked at Peter, and regarded Satan, who was sifting him, with an omnipotent look : Omnipotence then became the servant of truth.

No one comprehended better than Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, what he possessed in Divine truth, and what he might risk and expect, when he had the word of God on his side. A posterity had been promised him in Isaac, which should be blessed and made a blessing. Yet him he was commanded to sacrifice. He boldly seized the knife, most firmly convinced, that God must keep his word, because he was able to do so ; and thus he expected that his Omnipotence would minister to his truth, and that Isaac, though slain and burnt to ashes, would be raised from the dead, sooner than that God would suffer himself to be made a

liar, for that was impossible ; but otherwise every thing was possible with God, and through him, to him that believeth.

Jacob understood this also. The Lord had promised him, saying, " I will do thee good." Hence his Omnipotence could only be exercised towards him in so far as it was in accordance with this promise ; and because he adhered to it, the Almighty was unable to expel him from the place, but succumbed in the conflict.

Where is there a God like unto him, and how does Eternal Wisdom sport with his children ! We may well pray with David (Psalm cxix. 38), " Stablish thy word unto thy servant." We should then see the glory of God, and find in it a consolation which does not suffer us to perish in our misery. Has he not promised us every thing requisite for our salvation, joy, and prosperity ? And is it not made doubly sure to us by letter and seal, by Baptism and the Lord's Supper ? What more can we desire ? Will he not forgive transgression and sin ? Why do we therefore suffer anxious fears to perplex us ? The devil, and our own deceitful hearts, may murmur against it as much as they please. Will he not give us

a new heart, and make such people of us, as shall walk in his commandments, keep his statutes, and do according to them? And yet we are foolish enough to fear that we shall be obliged to retain our depraved hearts, because we cannot change them ourselves. Christ himself has engaged to be made unto us wisdom; can it be possible, therefore, that we should always continue foolish? He has undertaken our sanctification, and can we continue impure? In reality, we ought justly to feel much astonished at not being perfect saints: for what is the reason that we are not so? I think the chief cause of it lies in this, that we are too proud and self-righteous to expect every thing from pure grace, and for the sake of the word and promise of God; and are still desirous of accomplishing too much of ourselves, and of becoming too much in ourselves. Does not the true and faithful Word tell us that the Lord careth for us, and enjoin us to cast all our care upon him? But who believes this cheering truth? He that does so, finds rest and peace and refreshment when he is weary. But almost all refuse to listen to it, and care for themselves instead of believing. Hence they experience so

little of the glory of God, and torment themselves in vain with a burden which they have not strength to bear. We think it rational to trust to the creature, but absurd to hope in the living Creator. O what fools we are to act thus, seeing that we cannot change a single hair white or black ! How happy we might be did we believe the words, "He careth for you ;" therefore cast all your care upon him, both externally and internally. Were we at the same time humble, docile, and sufficiently resigned to his will, Jesus would not then put us to the blush by the example of the birds ; but, like the lark in the storm, we should sing hymns of praise in the midst of difficulties ; in short, in quietness and confidence would be our strength, and by returning and rest we should be saved. And is not his written word, whose minister and performer is Omnipotence, entirely of such a nature as to render us perfectly tranquil and easy ? " For though the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed : yet my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee."

But are not the justice and holiness of God,

such attributes as ought reasonably to render us timid in applying his promises to us ; and will not the consideration that we are sinners, make a great alteration in the matter ? If Jacob had thought thus, and acted accordingly, he would soon have fled from the scene of conflict ; for what else was he but a sinner ; and if he were otherwise, how did he become so—of himself or by the favour of him that called him ? “ Even before the twins were born ” says Paul, “ or had done either good or evil,” in order that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth ; it was said to Rebecca “ The elder shall serve the younger.” It is true we are sinners, but Jesus is come to save sinners ; hence our right to the Saviour increases—if I may so speak—in the degree in which we become conscious of our sinfulness. We ought also to know, that God did not give Canaan to the people of Israel for the sake of their righteousness—for I know, says he, that thou art a stiff-necked and rebellious people—and likewise that his promises are founded on free grace, and on the blood of Jesus Christ. If any one were to imagine that he had claims upon the Divine promises be-

cause of his good qualities and his good conduct, he would greatly deceive himself, and obtain little or nothing, because he did not understand how to buy without money. God knows what miserable sinners we are, much better than we do ; and has so marked and designated us in his book, that it is difficult to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, according to the description there given. But notwithstanding this, he has, to the praise of the glory of his grace, vouchsafed the greatest and most precious promises to these very characters ; and Christ, by his obedience, sufferings, and death, has sufficiently provided for the manifestation of Divine grace towards us, without any opposition from Divine justice and holiness. Grace, so to speak, is older than justice. The tree of life also is mentioned before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the threatening attached to it. The promise, according to the doctrine of Paul (Gal. iii. 17), is at least four hundred and thirty years older than the law, which revealed the righteousness and holiness of God, but which detracts as little from his promised grace, as a legal testament among men, which is in force on the death of the testator, can afterwards be set

aside ; and " this testament," says the Apostle, " that was confirmed before of God in Christ, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." We have therefore not to do with the law, which says, " Do this!" but with the Gospel, which says, " Ask of me ; I will give thee." If the Ethiopian nobleman could say, " What doth hinder me to be baptised ?"—we ought reasonably to say, ' What hinders my mind from the free exercise of faith and confidence, and from regarding itself in no other light, than as if every thing were already overcome, as if we were already in heaven, seeing that when we have once entered into the conflict of faith, and persevere in it, there is nothing to hinder us from obtaining the crown of life. For believers are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Oh, if we only understood aright what belonged to our peace, we would rejoice from gladness of heart, and the wicked one be unable to touch us !' Jacob understood it excellently—so excellently that he prevailed, even when the Almighty himself entered into conflict with him, but not before he had bound his own hands with the strong cords of love, and the firm bands of his faithful promises ; for his omnipotence took

the part of his antagonist, in order to bring him successfully through every trial. O certainly, all things are possible to him that believeth ! and assuredly if thou believest, thou shalt see the glory of God. If thou hast but one promise on thy side, thy glorious victory is rendered quite certain ; even if it should seem as impossible as the restoring of Lazarus to his sisters, after being dead four days, and having become a prey to corruption.

Thus did Jacob act like a prince, even as God boasts of him by the prophet Hosea ; just as it becomes a spiritual king, who does not cease to fight till the victory is decided. But what occurs ? “ When he saw that he prevailed not against him,” it is said, “ he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him.” This was a new wonder ; and was a remarkable one, for it is mentioned twice. The cause of the dislocation is stated in the words, “ He touched the hollow of his thigh,” and whilst depriving Jacob of all power to continue the combat, he proved his entire superiority, but at the same time added that which was incomprehensible, to that which was wonderful, by declaring himself,

notwithstanding, to be vanquished, when he said to the Patriarch, "Let me go."

The hip is, so to speak, the foundation of the edifice of our body. If dislocated, the body falls down. A dislocation of the hip is an extremely rare case, only practicable to astonishing strength; and almost inconceivable in the position which a person must assume in wrestling with another, who is seeking to drive him from his place, as was the case with Jacob. But if it occurs, and takes place by means of a mere touch, as in the present instance, it is a singular wonder. Such a dislocation is naturally attended with very violent pain. Whether the Son of God caused Jacob to experience the latter also, we know not; it depended upon his will, and the effect was in every case the same. The good man could wrestle no longer; nothing therefore was left him but to hold fast to his opponent by his arms, to cleave to him with all his might; and this he did likewise in such a manner, that his opponent could not remove from the place without dragging him along with him; hence it was that he said, "Let me go." But Jacob could no longer either stand or go; much less continue to wrestle; he was compelled to let

himself be carried ; and to this he was forced by the Son of God himself, who deprived him of all his strength, and left him no alternative but to hang upon his neck if he wished to be preserved from falling. But what is the meaning of this ? Why did the Son of God put his hip out of joint, and perhaps cause him violent pain by so doing ? What was the object, the intention, the reason ?

First of all, we must know that God, by the prophet Isaiah, has replied to Jacob's enquiry of his antagonist, 'What is thy name ?' when he says, "His name shall be called Wonderful." There is doubtless as much humility as wisdom, whilst enquiring why God acts in this or that particular manner, if we can perfectly satisfy ourselves with the reply, Because it pleases him to act thus ; for in the sequel, we shall probably receive satisfactory light upon the subject. In his method of government, much that is incomprehensible occurs, and we must learn to humble ourselves under his mighty hand ; he will then exalt us in due time. So long as Job continued to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord !" it is said, "In all this Job sinned

not." But when he afterwards disputed with his friends upon the cause and intent of what had befallen him, they fell into a degree of confusion, from which they were unable to extricate themselves. Job wished to accuse God of injustice; his friends, to charge him with ungodliness; and both were in the wrong. At length God himself interfered, and said, "If thou art so wise as to be able to fathom every thing, gird up now thy loins like a man, for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me." On which Job however reversed the matter, and said, "I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me." It was then said, "My servant Job hath spoken right concerning me."

If Abraham had been desirous of ascertaining first of all the object and intention of offering up his son Isaac, he would have frustrated them; but he believed that God could do nothing but what was in accordance with his word, and thus he ascended Mount Moriah, and obtained the high commendation expressed in the words, "Now I know that thou fearest God."

When Christ began to wash the feet of his

disciples, Peter wished first of all to know the intention of this act, before he would consent to give up his feet for that purpose ; but he was told, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter;" and when this proved unavailing, the Lord said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me."

"My sheep follow me," says Christ ; but he not unfrequently leads them in such a manner, as if he were not a shepherd, but was only conducting them to the butchery. Are these the people of God, it might be asked, who appear only to exist in order to be persecuted, slain, torn by dogs and wild beasts, and covered with pitch to illuminate the streets of Rome with the slow flame ? But they counted not their lives too dear to them, and are destined to shine in heaven as the stars for ever and ever. The Lord of his people wears, instead of a golden coronet, a crown of thorns ; instead of a sceptre, a weak reed ; and hangs on a cross, instead of sitting upon a throne. What a Lord ! what a people !

True it is, that the preaching of such things seems foolishness, and that the natural man becomes quite foolish in consequence of it. But do thou only believe ; wait for the Lord in the

way of his judgments : the end of it all will be glorious—a glory which no eye hath seen, no ear heard, and which has never entered into the heart of man. His name is, “Wonderful ;” and he is so in his works and guidance. Even if we are unable to discover any wisdom in his conduct towards Jacob, yet we ought still to believe, that he acted thus towards him for very wise and salutary reasons, although it may not have pleased him to reveal any thing to us respecting them.

It is, however, not difficult to discover some of the salutary intentions of such a procedure. The chief of them is this : that when God suffers us to become conscious, by inward experience, that we have no righteousness of our own, and that we are unable to acquire any ; that by our own wisdom we cannot accomplish any thing : and that when he thus humbles us, it is a path by which he conducts all his children, although the means are various by which he attains this end. These paths are painful to the old man, even as the dislocation of his hip was to Jacob ; but the pain is richly compensated by the fruits which follow.

At first we form to ourselves strange and un-

founded ideas of religion. We imagine such a growth in it as we perceive in children, who have gradually less need of their mother's care and attention, until they can at length entirely do without it. But Christ prefers comparing his people to the branches of the vine, which never bring forth fruit of themselves, but solely by their abiding in the vine. In like manner, says he, "Ye cannot bring forth fruit of yourselves, except ye abide in me; for without me ye can do nothing." The ideas we form of religion at the commencement, correspond little with this figure. We think of aged Christians, that they are far advanced; and they may have really advanced as far as Jacob, who could no longer stand nor go of himself, much less wrestle, and who had no alternative but to cling to the Son of God, that he might be sustained by him, or according to the expression of the Apostle, To live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us. When they are weak he is their strength: they have nothing, and yet possess all things; are unable, of themselves, even to think any thing good, and yet are able to do all things; and many more such singular de-

scriptions of the inward life, which may justly be called a continual riddle, which cannot be solved without personal experience.

Real growth, which must certainly take place in every real Christian, does not consist in an increasing facility in the performance of religious duties in and by ourselves; but it is rather an increase in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ; an increasing facility in making use of Christ in the manner in which he is made and given unto us of God, and this can naturally be learnt in no other manner than by the destruction of our own wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, by which *we* decrease, but Christ increases.

The hip, if I may so speak, on which the whole body of a natural godliness rests, the foundation that supports it, is nothing else than confidence in ourselves. Hence the upright are proud of their uprightness, and have reason to be so, because it is a consequence of their diligence; they are indebted for it to their discernment, their own reflection, or to the understanding which they possess, and their commendable conduct is the result of the good resolutions they formed, and which they were

strong enough to carry into effect. The noise which is made about human inability, they regard as idle talk, by which nothing else is demonstrated than the individual's own slothfulness; or else they look upon it as an artifice, designed to cover his worthlessness, and to enable him to reject, in an hypocritical manner, a strictly moral deportment; and the appealing to grace is, in their eyes, little more than blaming God because we are not better than we are. Both, in their opinion, are equally abominable; and they thank God that they are not enthusiasts and nominal Christians, like these people. These are the strong who need not a Physician.

Natural men, who lead an ungodly life, and therefore cannot appeal to their virtues, always excuse themselves, because they have not committed this or that particular sin, or else deceive themselves with the idea, that when once they find it necessary to amend, they shall soon be able to accomplish it; but that there is still time enough for such a purpose. With that real religion, to which they will not concede the appellation, both of these classes refuse to have any thing to do, but are opposed

to it, since the greatest part of it appears to them extremely irrational and absurd, so that a sensible man has reason to be ashamed of it. They rely upon their own understanding and their own strength, and do not comprehend upon what a person can otherwise depend. But let them go ; for they are blind !

When the Lord, however, begins to wrestle with a soul—by which we mean, when he begins his work of grace in a man—he struggles with him in such a manner, that to a certainty, either earlier or later, the hip will be dislocated, and so put out of joint, that no other choice will be left him than that which was left Jacob—that of embracing with the arms of faith the Son of God ; there will be no alternative but to let himself be borne and carried by him. By degrees he is entirely brought off from his previous method of existing and acting, and conducted into a path, of which he must himself confess that flesh and blood have not revealed it to him ; that he has not learned it from books, from sermons, from other men, or from his own wisdom ; but that wondrous grace first reduced him to the state of a little child, and then began to reveal to him the

mystery of the kingdom of God. He now learns to believe from the heart those passages of Scripture, where it is said, "Not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;" and others of a similar nature, which had secretly given him offence before, but which now become wisdom itself to him. He now experiences how much reason Peter had to call the light, to which the chosen generation is called out of darkness, "a marvellous light."

We could still say much in pointing out how the Lord, in repentance, commences the destruction of the false ground of self-confidence, and then carries it on and completes it by a variety of trials, and in a very strange manner, until the sinner, stripped of every thing, casts himself into the arms of his blessed Lord and Saviour. But we break off, and leave the subject to a future opportunity.

We only ask, in conclusion, What becomes of our wisdom according to the wisdom of the Christian religion, which, as the way to wisdom, directs that we should become fools according to the maxims of the world, and affirms, that he who thinks he knows any

thing, knows yet nothing as he ought? What becomes of our strength, when Christ is only mighty in the weak, and we without him can do nothing? What becomes of our righteousness, since we are all declared to be unrighteous, and that there is no difference amongst us, except what is made by the grace of God? What becomes of our labour and efforts, since we are saved by grace? Lord, open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law!

SERMON III.

INTRODUCTION.

It is evident, especially from Matt. xiv. 36, what a salutary and healing power Jesus must have possessed. He came into the land of Gennesaret. Scarcely had he left the vessel and stepped on shore, than he was immediately recognized. The people of that place sent out into all the country round about, in order to make it every where known. A number of sick persons from far and near, who laboured under a variety of diseases, were brought to him, and they besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched it were made whole, whatever might have been their complaint.

‘How much it is to be regretted,’ might some one think, ‘that Jesus is no longer upon earth!’ But wherefore? If he could heal the

sick, even at a distance from them, he must still be able to do so now that he is ascended up on high. And it would be highly derogatory to him to pretend, that Jesus is now so shut up in heaven, that it is impossible for us to experience, or become conscious of anything more of him ; since he has said, " Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world ! " But it would also be a matter of regret, if we had such an abundance of temporal things as to render Jesus indifferent to us, because he no longer heals our bodily diseases, except through a medium. We all require his medical aid, his healing power, in a more important sense than the people of Gennesaret experienced it—I mean with respect to our souls, whose disease is called *Sin* ; the natural consequence of which is death, eternal death. Of this we must necessarily be healed ; and may be so, although we cannot, and ought not, to accomplish it as of ourselves. Jesus is also our physician, and so full of healing power, that he is at the same time the medicine. If we wish to be healed, we must at least touch the hem of his garment. " Thou art clothed with light," says David, " and art very glorious." The glory of

Jesus Christ is a perfect glory. The skirt of his garment is his meekness and humility, which fit him to be the physician of such diseased creatures as we. His invitations and promises are the hem which we ought to touch. It is not permitted to every one to approach the great and the mighty upon earth: but the contrary is the case with the Monarch of the skies. We may touch him, if we entreat him to let us do so. And we really touch him by the feeling of our wretchedness, and by our sincere longing and desire for the sanctification of our souls, by prayer, and particularly by believing confidence. But what benefit was derived from thus touching Jesus? All who did so were made whole. And such is still the case. Jesus retains the reputation of being a perfect, and at the same time the only, physician of souls. Deeply feel thy need of him, and then thou wilt also say with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

GENESIS XXXII. 26.

*“ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh.
And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou
bless me.”*

IN the remarkable event recorded in this and the two preceding verses, one wonder succeeds another. The Son of God puts Jacob's thigh out of joint; but Jacob, so far from losing courage, throws himself upon the neck of him who had deprived him of all his strength, that he may be borne by him, since he is no longer able to stand of himself. A new wonder now occurs; the Son of God entreats Jacob—the victor the vanquished—the strong the weak—to let him go. But Jacob wisely takes advantage of the opportunity, and replies, “ I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

“ Let me go,” says the Son of God to Jacob; and these words belong to those wondrous expressions, of which there are many in the Scriptures—to those expressions which, at first sight, seem to intimate something absurd, and yet bear upon them the impress of Divine wis-

dom. If we were desirous of producing a whole series of such paradoxes, of such seeming contradictions, they would be such as the following : " When I am weak," as Paul says, " then am I strong." " As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich ; as having nothing, yet possessing all things."

" Let me go." Was he in earnest, or did he merely dissemble ? Dissemble ? Who can think that of him who is faithful and true. If he had been in earnest, it would have been an easy thing to extricate himself from the arms of Jacob. It was therefore a new temptation, into which he led the patriarch. It would have been ill for the latter, if he had let him go ; he would have miserably sunk upon the ground, the Son of God would have vanished, and with him the blessing which he obtained by holding him fast.

" Let me go." Could he not have dislocated his arms ; which is an easier matter than putting a hip out of joint ? No, his power did not extend so far, because it necessarily remained within the limits assigned to it by the Divine promise, " I will do thee good." But the dislocation of Jacob's arms, the extricating him-

self from them ; the hasting away without conferring a blessing, would not have been a benefit, but an injury ; and this he certainly could not inflict for his word's sake.

“ Let me go.” Did he need for this purpose the consent of his friend ? Assuredly he did. He had established the covenant of grace with him, and with all the spiritual descendants of Abraham, according to which he engaged to be their shield and their defence. He has bound himself to bless them and to do them good, and cannot free himself from this obligation, which he has confirmed with an oath, without the consent of those in alliance with him ; and he himself has, in their regeneration, imparted such a feeling to them, that they never can nor will consent to it. “ When thou saidst, Seek ye my face ; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” If we deny him, he will also deny us ; if we believe not, yet he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himself (2 Tim. ii. 12, 13). Our unbelief cannot render the faith of God without effect (Rom. iii. 3). But did he really desire that Jacob should exonerate him from the obligation to do him good ? Certainly not : but he wished to have the pleasure of seeing how firm,

by his grace, are the hearts of his allies, even when many waters of affliction go over them ; and how the seed of God remains in his children. It was therefore uncommonly pleasing to him, when Job exclaimed, " Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ;" and equally so when his disciples said, " Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life ;" and in the same manner when his church continues to cleave firmly to him in the extremity of tribulation and temptation. He himself is the author of this constancy ; and hence it is, that it is so pleasing in his sight ; for he takes pleasure in all his works. What joy it will have caused him at being unable to shake off Jacob ; when the latter held firmly by his word, and did not suffer himself to be moved away from the spot, whatever the Lord might say or do to him, after he had once engaged to do him good ; that he even threw himself upon his neck, after he had deprived him of the ability to stand alone, and continued immutably firm, when it was said to him, " Let me go !" And what pleasure it still causes him, when the Christian does not suffer himself to be dismayed by afflictions and temptations, but even then cleaves to his word and his grace,

when every thing seems against him ; when he continues faithful unto death !

“ Let me go.” The Lord said this to the Patriarch, to try him whether he really loved him who attacked him so severely, and caused him such sensible pain. That which the Lord here says to Jacob, was said to Job by his wife, “ Dost thou still retain thine integrity,” although God visits thee with such unheard of afflictions ?” Take leave of him and let him go. It is in reality no small attainment, not only to act patiently in tribulation, but even to glory in it, and not to doubt for a moment of the goodness, compassion, and merciful kindness of the Lord. And when induced to complain with the church, in Isaiah lxiii. 15, “ Where is the sounding of thy bowels and thy mercies towards me ? are they restrained ?” still to say, “ Doubtless thou art our Father ;” to confess with David, “ Thy way is in the sanctuary ;” and with Jeremiah, in his Lamentations, “ Thy goodness is every morning new !” This is no easy matter.

In the present season of distress, God has certainly given many of his children an opportunity of refusing to learn this lesson ; and the Tempter

may have said to many, what the enemies of Jesus called out to him, when he hung upon the cross : " He trusted in God, let him deliver him now."

" Let me go." The Lord spoke thus to the Patriarch to put his faith to the test, and ascertain whether he would still cleave to the promise, " I will do thee good," although the hostile conduct of the Son of God seemed to prove just the contrary.

Faith has various gradations : at one time, it is a faith which arises from seeing, feeling, tasting, and from the Lord's drawing near in loving kindness and tender mercy to the pardoned soul, in such a manner that the individual is able to say, ' I believe, not merely because of thy word, but because I experience in myself that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the soul.' This is valuable experience, sweet in the sensation, and precious in the fruit. But faith, which seems in these circumstances to be uncommonly strong, is in reality very weak. It supports its steps with the staff of sensation. Sensible joy in the Lord is its strength. It has its foundation more in itself than in the Lord ; and often sinks down to the extreme of despondency, when

the transports it previously felt diminish.— A higher degree is, not to see, and yet believe ; pray according to the word, and believe that the prayer will be answered, although there is no tangible proof of it ; believe that the Lord's ways are goodness and truth, although reason does not see them to be so.

But it is a step further still, when we believe in hope, where nothing is to be hoped for—nay, even against hope, and against feeling. Thus the Captain of our salvation believed, in defiance of every thing to the contrary, when, forsaken of God, assaulted by the visible and invisible world, he hung upon the cross for three hours together, full of pain in body and soul. God laid him in the dust of death, and yet he called him, in faith, his God.

This is the highest degree of faith. He who is desirous of exercising it, must be established in the knowledge of the mystery of God, and far advanced in the denial of himself ; the joint of confidence in his own strength and wisdom, must be considerably dislocated ; he must be able to look pretty deep into the heart of Jesus, and yet say with Paul, " We are perplexed, but not in despair " (2 Cor. iv. 8).

"I believed, therefore have I spoken." (Psalm cxvi. 10.)

"Let me go." Jacob's courage was also put to the test. 'Let him go,' he might have thought. 'Thy tears, thy prayers, have been altogether fruitless. He has put thy thigh out of joint, and what else does the pain of it tell thee, than that he cherishes no favourable sentiments towards thee. Who knows what injury he may still occasion thee! Although he sees that thou must miserably sink to the ground, and thus, without even being able to escape from Esau, must fall into his cruel hands, yet he desires thee to let him go.' But Jesus had already taken care that he should not be able to let him go, by leaving him no choice, but placing him under the necessity of cleaving to him. No, Jesus must himself repulse him, and let go his hold of him; but this he did not do, and rejecting is what Jesus cannot do; for he has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Hence we must exercise courage, or else give up all for lost. Jacob was constrained to act thus.

O happy souls, whom Jesus has wounded in such a manner that he alone can heal them,

and whom he binds to himself by the feeling of their misery ; to whom he leaves only the choice between life and death ; and who are compelled to say with Hosea, " Come, and let us return unto the Lord ; for he hath torn, and he will heal us ; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. He will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight " (ch. vi. 1, 2). Happy is he who feels compelled to continue cleaving, though he may be under the necessity of persevering in doing so, even to the end of his life, without receiving consolation ; because, unless he does so, he sees nothing but death and destruction before him ! O wait on the Lord ; though he tarry, be of good courage and undismayed, and wait, I say, on the Lord !

" Let me go." What courage must this have imparted to Jacob ! For what did the words imply ? That the Son of God was in his power, and that he would not depart, unless Jacob gave his consent to it ; and this he had himself rendered impossible. What a futile reason was that which he adduced, " For the day breaketh." ' Let it break,' might Jacob have replied, ' what is that to me ? I have a thousand reasons why I will not let thee go,

and even the breaking of the day is one of them. A painful day is approaching. I am afraid of my brother Esau. I stand in especial need of thy blessing. Thou dost well to remind me of it, that I may cleave to thee still more closely.'

O how pleasing must it have been to Jesus, that his pupil stood the test so well, and that his good work shone forth in such a lovely manner in him ! In consequence of the promises which are given us, Jesus is also in our power in like manner; and however wonderfully he may deal with us, as his name imports, yet he can deny neither himself nor his word. If he reproaches thee with being a sinner, justify him in doing so; but plead with him, in return, that he is the Saviour of sinners. Confess that he is in the right, when he sets before thee thy unbelief, thy wretchedness, and thy unworthiness; and set his word before him, "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." When he was an infant, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes; and his promises are now the cords of love by which we may hold him fast. And the best of all is, he holds us fast; otherwise timid Jacob would have taken to

flight at the first attack. O how lovely ! he was afraid of his brother Esau, but not of the Son of God, even when he dislocated his thigh.

“ Let me go.” How wonderful, that he declared himself vanquished at the very moment when Jacob was unable to do any thing more ! As long as Jacob, resting on his feet, was able to defend himself, his antagonist also did his best against him. But no sooner are his feet no longer of any use to him, and Jesus must be alone and entirely his support, than he becomes so wholly and solely ; and Jacob, when unable to do any thing more, can now do all things through Christ, who strengthens him ; in whom he has righteousness and strength, and who himself deprived him of his own strength.

In the Divine life the same thing is wont to occur. At the commencement, we are generally able to do many things ; we form noble resolutions, and expect to fulfil them faithfully, in which we succeed to a tolerable extent. We arm ourselves with a multitude of laudable maxims and noble motives. We hear and read the word of God with unction and devotion. We pray much, and with fervour. If we commit a fault, we repent of it bitterly, and renew our good resolutions.

But what generally happens afterwards ? The fervour in prayer expires, and the oppressed heart can scarcely relieve itself by sighs and ejaculations ; it can seldom shed a tear, and must experience, to its sorrow, that the word is in the right to speak of " stony hearts." Gladly would the individual feel the right kind of sorrow at it ; but he seems to himself to be hardened. And if he prays, where is the fervour ? where the faith ? And yet no prayer is heard, unless it be offered in faith. Where is devotion ? when even the reception of the holy sacrament itself cannot restrain the wandering mind, however much he may strive to occupy himself only with good thoughts.

And the good resolutions ? Oh, he no longer knows himself, whether they are altogether sincere ! He feels, indeed, self-love, unbelief, and hardness of heart ; but how to alter it, unless the Holy Spirit does it ; and how to obtain him, when he prays so wretchedly, is then the question.

The Christian then feels like Jacob did, when his hip ~~was~~ out of joint. He supposes he must irrecoverably fall a prey to the wretchedness which he fears. If Jesus does not accomplish

the work entirely ; if he be not the beginning, middle, and end ; if we are not saved by grace alone ; there is at least nothing more for him to hope for. The name of Jesus alone, and the word grace, sustains him in some measure, while every other support gives way.

But how does the faithful Shepherd act under these circumstances ? This is the real time of mercy. O what does the poor man now perceive ! His Saviour and his Gospel. He recognises his supreme faithfulness in having humbled him, although he thought his Lord and Master acted strangely, and intended evil towards him. He now finds that the Lord permitted him to succeed in nothing, although he could not conceive before why he did not listen to his anxious supplication. He now understands that the Lord hedged up his way with thorns, to make him take the right one ; and led him into the desert, that he might speak kindly to him.

After having suffered the loss of his own strength, he now succeeds in the very same way in which Jacob succeeded, whilst casting himself entirely upon Him who is all to us.

“ Let me go.” This is like the sporting of Eternal Wisdom in “ the habitable parts of

the earth," which she often repeats, in order to have her delights with the good conduct of the children of men.

A similar circumstance is mentioned concerning Moses, in *Exod. xxxii.* This man of God remained a long time upon Mount Sinai, on which God had given his law. At length the people said, "We know not what is become of the man;" and induced the brother of Moses to make them a golden calf. He did so, and they honoured it as their God—ate and drank, played and danced, around it. The Lord informed Moses of it, and said to him, "I see that this is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation." Without the consent of his servant, the Lord would do nothing; and Moses so adroitly took advantage of this condescension, that he took the forgiveness of the people's sin with him from the Mount. And how ably did he oppose the Lord with his own weapons! He confesses the wickedness of the people, but pleads with him also his word, his oath, and the honour of his name; and binds his arm, as it were, although

already lifted up to punish. For God always acts only in accordance with his word.

The Syrophenician woman is also a remarkable instance of this. It was assuredly only to help her, that the Saviour took a long journey to the borders of Tyre and Sidon. But just as if he would have nothing more to do with helping and delivering, he went into a house, and would not that any one should know he was there; but, fortunately, he could not continue hid. His arrival became known; and, happily, a poor afflicted Canaanitish woman heard of it. She besought him, pitiably, to help her; but Jesus did not even look back, much less answer her a word. He let her cry on, and walked unmercifully forward. But could his heart have been seen, it would have been evident how it melted with compassion. The disciples, highly astonished at the extraordinary behaviour of their Master, intercede for the poor woman; but they are repulsed, and that in a manner which would have deprived even the distressed mother of all courage, had not the Lord continued secretly to impart fresh courage to her: "I am not sent," said he, "but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" and not to peo-

ple like this woman. But she will not take a refusal; she blocks up his path, falls at his feet, and exclaims, "Lord, help me!" She had even now to sustain the severest test, and is told in reply, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to give it unto dogs." "Yea, Lord," answered she, "it is certainly not right; do not treat me therefore as a child, but as a dog, to which the crumbs are given which fall from the table." Jesus is now overcome: "O woman," he exclaims, "great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

After his resurrection, he joined himself to the two disciples going to Emmaus. He spake to them in such a manner, that their hearts began to burn with love and joy whilst he expounded the Scriptures to them. He holds their eyes, and they walk forwards with him, and listen to him, without knowing who he is. At length, towards evening, they arrive at the inn. His love is too great for him to leave them, and yet he wishes to have the pleasure of being invited by them. He makes therefore as if he would go further, whilst rendering it impossible for them to let him go. They urged him to remain, or, more properly, they com-

pelled him ; which gratified him much. He remained therefore. Whilst breaking the bread, their eyes were opened. They knew him, and the same moment he vanished. Their joy was too much for them alone ; they hastened back to Jerusalem, and there all was joy, animation, and triumph. He was risen indeed.

Lazarus, his friend, dies ; although he is informed of his sickness, and sends word that it is not unto death. He remains quietly in his place : he suffers the friend whom he loves to expire. Lazarus is buried, and lies four days in the grave. All hope is at an end. Jesus suffers Mary and Martha to weep and mourn, although he loves them also, and does not once visit them. He even almost confuses their faith ; for Lazarus is dead, although he had said, " The sickness is not unto death." At length he comes, but too late ; and now stands and weeps with them, although he might have helped them. " Ah, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," says Mary, and falls weeping and almost heart-broken at his feet ; and no one can refrain from weeping, not even he himself. All at once he exclaims, " Lazarus, come forth !" and the dead man

again comes to life, after he had been dead four days. For Christ's word and promise must be fulfilled, whatever happens ; and Abraham went by no means to too great lengths, in hoping, after receiving the Divine promise, where nothing was to be hoped for.

“ Let me go.” If many of those who belong to Christ, who surrender themselves to him with heart and hand, are to be surnamed Jacob and Israel, as we read in Isaiah xliv., they will have to pass through a similar conflict to that here described.

“ Let him go,” says the world and sin, at first, to the heart which is desirous of resigning itself to Jesus ; as if we should fare better in the service of sin, than in following Jesus. It may violently and variously incite and tempt us to withdraw our hearts from Jesus, and no longer strive against it, but submit ourselves to it. The world advises us to let Jesus go, and whispers, “ Why wilt thou renounce the company and amusements thou hast hitherto enjoyed, and trouble and shorten thy days ? Consider what others will say to it. Who can live in such a manner ? It is not even necessary ; and if it were, it is still time

enough. It seeks to gain only a particle of our hearts, because all the rest easily follows. If Jesus himself was obliged to endure such temptations, as when it was said, "All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me!" we must also be satisfied to bear them, and shew ourselves as good soldiers of Christ.

Satan also says, "Let him go," even as he deceitfully promised Jesus himself the whole world, if he would let God go, and serve the prince of this world. As long as he is able, he takes away the word from the heart of man. When he can no longer succeed in this, and the individual begins to think with all earnestness of his salvation, he then tries to depict godliness as much too difficult; the heart of Jesus as full of wrath and displeasure; and to persuade him that it is now too late, and that it will not avail, whatever trouble he may give himself; he is either too great a sinner, or is much too small a one in his own eyes. "Trouble not the master," therefore; what will it avail? pacify thyself as well as thou art able, and let the serious thought of Jesus and thy salvation go. And he may even go so far as to quote what the despisers say in Mal. iii. 14,

"It is in vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?"

Yea, even as Jesus once said to his disciples, "Will ye also go away?" and here said to Jacob, "Let me go;" he also informs us, that if we will follow him, we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross; that the path is narrow on which he leads us, and that we must not expect continued enjoyment, but also sensible sufferings. If he often lets us pray a long time before he comes to our aid, or conceals himself anew, when we supposed we had really found him, and when we cannot perceive by his guidance that he loves us, cares for us, will do all things well, but seems, on the contrary, to be opposed to us, as in the case of Jacob—he then, as it were, says to us, "Let me go."

In such a situation, the Christian has a fine opportunity of giving a proof of his estimation of Jesus, and of his earnestness in seeking salvation, of showing what is the object of his desire and choice, what he clings to, and what he is willing to offer up. Job went so far in this as to declare, that he would rather die than part with

his integrity. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac, the dearest and the best he had in the world. The Apostles, and many thousands of other Christians, did not shun bonds and imprisonment—nay, even every torture, and the most horrible death, to win Christ.

The Saviour is not only able, but frequently really gives his people such an insight into his heart, so full of love, grace, and truth, that, like Jacob, they clearly perceive that they may ask in his name what they will, in the certainty that he will grant it them; and, in a certain sense, must do so, for his faithfulness and his truth's sake.

Their hearts become so enlarged, that they feel the entire emphasis of the passage, "He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all—how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!" "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." Jacob's heart expanded so much at the words, "Let me go," that he answered, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." But more of this another time. At present I only add:

If you are desirous of becoming true and

sincere Christians, let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye believe in God—believe also in Jesus Christ. If sometimes your path is strange, incomprehensible, and painful, you have no reason to fear. Be not dismayed, when you can accomplish nothing more by your own strength ; for Christ makes you weak, only that his strength may be perfected in your weakness. But, whether courageous or fearful, do not forsake Jesus.

“Faithful is he who hath called you, who also will do it.” Amen.

SERMON IV.

GENESIS XXXII. 26.

*And he said, I will not let thee go unless thou
bless me.*

WE read, in 2 Kings xiii. 14, that Elisha, that great and remarkable prophet, at length fell sick, and drew near his end. Joash, the king of Israel, came and visited him; and when he saw how dangerous his illness was, the king wept, and exclaimed, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" Thou art near death, who wast more to Israel than a whole army, and often delivered it out of its distresses! What a loss! especially at a time when the Syrians were pressing Israel sorely.

The sick prophet had pleasing news from the Lord for the sorrowing king, which he com-

municated to him in a symbolical manner. He told him to open a window, and shoot out of it. The king shot, and the prophet said, "This is an arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria." He then told the king to take other arrows, and smite upon the ground with them ; which was again intended as a pre-intimation of successful occurrences ; as Joash might have inferred from the first sign. But he smote only thrice, and then ceased. The man of God was then wroth with him, and said, "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times ; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it ; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice."

Such is the history. What does it teach us ? That we should not stop half way in the spiritual course, but press forward to the mark. Even in spiritual things we may stop, after having smitten thrice, when we ought to have done it six times. Some satisfy themselves entirely with the externals of religion ; and are contented with having smitten once, so to speak. Propriety of conduct, going to church, and the reception of the sacrament, constitute the whole of their religion. They ought, however, to go on to repentance and faith, and thus smite five or six

times. Some smite the ground twice, and add to their outward observances, attendance at meetings, and a greater degree of prayer ; they also feel a little distressed, and are then a little relieved, and are like the foolish virgins who carry lamps without oil ; are ever hearing and learning, and yet do not attain to the knowledge of the truth. Others possess genuine grace, poverty of spirit, sorrow for sin, and a hungering and thirsting after righteousness ; and yet, like Joash, they do not obtain a complete victory, although they obtain salvation : their faith rests upon their feelings, and is as mutable as the latter. It depends upon the consciousness of the characteristic marks of a state of grace, and is founded more upon the grace in them, than that which is in Christ Jesus ; and hence they are never comfortable ; they smite the ground twice or thrice ; they do not proceed in a direct line towards Jesus ; and resemble a man who looks at a star through a telescope held by a trembling hand—he sees it sometimes, but not at others, and must then seek it again.

There are also some who, like the Corinthians whom Paul reproves, are soon satisfied.

They have had some experience in religion, their acquaintance with which induces them to reckon themselves amongst the children of God, notwithstanding all their present coldness and estrangement from Jesus ; and to regard it as faith, and even strong faith, that they do not doubt of their state of grace. But believing in Jesus is certainly something else than the belief in our own state of grace ; and salvation is promised, not to the latter, but to the former. If we are in the vine, where is the sap ? They have ceased to smite, when they ought to have continued to do so.

But there are others who look stedfastly unto Jesus, and do not receive him half, but entirely ; not occasionally, but continually ; and maintain an uninterrupted intercourse with him. They are wholly sinners in their own esteem, and let Jesus be their entire Saviour ; and thus they smite five or six times, until they consume the Syrian host.

Jacob, terrified at the wrath of his brother Esau, has recourse to the Lord in prayer. Scarcely has he begun to do so, when a man lays hold of him, in the darkness of the night, and struggles with him. He endeavours not

only by bodily strength to expel him from the place, but also to drive him from the throne of grace, by setting before him his sins ; both, however, solely with the intention of exercising his faith, and occasioning him a new victory. Jacob resists with his bodily powers, and especially by tears and prayers, according to Hosea (xii. 4). The struggle becomes more violent, so that the patriarch's thigh is dislocated by the touch of his antagonist. But the very moment in which he was unable to continue the conflict, in consequence of being deprived of his strength, and when compelled to sink down completely overcome, so that he must necessarily fall into the hands of Esau, he throws himself upon the neck of his opponent, who then declares himself vanquished : thus he is in Jacob's power, and cannot depart, unless the patriarch voluntarily releases him. Wonderful procedure ! As long as Jacob possessed strength he was overcome, and conquers at the moment when it forsakes him. " When I am weak, then am I strong." To them that have no might, increased power is given, whilst the strong grow weary and fall. Who can understand it, or comprehend the wonders of the

kingdom of God? Only they to whom it is given. To others it is a stumbling-block, and foolishness. Jacob perceived very clearly what was implied in the words, "Let me go;" he perceived that his opponent was in his power, yielded himself to him, and virtually said, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession." And he faithfully took advantage of this when he answered, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me."

We consider,

What the blessing implied :

Jacob's resolution not to let the Son of
God go, before bestowing it; and lastly;
The result.

The Lord, in his word, has opened the door of grace to us to an astonishing extent. If we had faith, and, like Jacob, made a due and bold use of it, we should experience marvellous things. It is said in general, "Ask, and ye shall receive. Ask, and it shall be given you, that your joy may be full." And there is no limitation prescribed, either in asking or in giving; on the contrary Christ says, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye

receive them, and ye shall have them;" and adds, "Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe those things which he saith shall come to pass: he shall have whatsoever he saith." What a bill—if I may speak in a mercantile manner—has He whose name is Amen, here drawn upon himself!—and since his riches are unsearchable, there is no doubt of the payment. "Yes," says Paul, "he is rich unto all that call upon him."

It is however said, "Have faith in God!" and there is great want of this upon earth. The testimony of man is received; but the testimony of God, which is greater—dreadful thought!—no man receiveth. But he that receives it, sets to his seal that God is true; and he that does not, deprives himself of eternal life. (John iii. 32, 33.)

In how many different ways the Saviour seeks to encourage boldness in prayer! He asks parents whether they would give a stone to their children when asking for bread, or poison instead of food; and teaches us to draw the

conclusion, that God who is gracious, and even love itself, is certainly ready to bestow blessings which cost him nothing, since men are capable of doing good, though they are evil, and though it costs them something. Is it possible, that a friend can show kindness to another, when urgently entreated, although it occasion him trouble; and you will not place a similar confidence in God, who, by a mere nod, can communicate the greatest blessings to you, without being the least incommoded by it? You think it possible that a haughty and unrighteous judge, who neither fears God nor regards man, may be induced, by the persevering entreaties of an inconsiderable widow, to grant her request; and yet imagine that your kind and gracious Father will unfeelingly suffer you to supplicate him in vain?—He who says, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee.” Be ashamed of your incredulity! If he has given up his Son—the best, and dearest, and most excellent of all he possessed—shall he hesitate about infinitely inferior benefits? Will he not rather, with him, freely give us all things? Is it not irrational, absurd folly and sin to cherish the smallest doubt of

it? Ah, Lord, teach us how to pray! for it is a wonderful art to be able to pray aright.

We know neither how we ought to pray, nor what we ought to pray for as we ought. But the Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. And certainly prayer is a very different thing to the sound and arrangement of the words that are used; and it is a question, with respect to many, whether ever they prayed in their lives, however often they thought they prayed and seemed to pray; whilst others pray very powerfully who believe they cannot pray at all. "But if ye abide in me, says the Saviour, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John xv. 7.)

Jacob understood all this. He perceived that he had the Son of God in his power, and could request as great a blessing of him as he wished. Hence he declares that he will not let him go unless he bless him.

But what is the meaning of blessing?

It means, amongst men, wishing them every good, particularly of a spiritual kind, from God through Christ, in a praying and believing frame. The blessings which Isaac, and after-

wards Jacob, pronounced upon his sons, were prophetic announcements, and therefore of a very peculiar kind. The first-mentioned description of blessing is pleasing and salutary.

Pleasing are the good wishes of one towards another, when springing from a loving heart, which is turned towards God through Christ; for they are proofs and signs of love, and consequently expressions of the image of God. They are therefore beautiful and sacred, and only true Christians know how to bestow them, —and they do so too. How many salutations does the New Testament contain! The sixteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans consists almost entirely of them; and saluting or greeting means nothing more than affectionately blessing, and consists not in the sound of words, but in the emotion of the heart. It is an exercise becoming Christians; for they are priests, whose province it is to bless. Hence Paul took pleasure also in mentioning the salutations of others, which he by no means looked upon as inconsiderable trifles. St. John likewise does not fail to communicate the salutations of pious children, with which he had been charged, as his second Epistle proves. But he looks

upon such salutations very earnestly and closely, when, in the same Epistle, he enjoins that those who do not bring with them the doctrine of Christ—the doctrine of the Father and the Son—shall not be received into the house, nor even be wished God speed; for John possessed as much holiness as love, respecting which we must not imagine that it consents to every thing, although it doth not behave itself unseemly. God himself is a sea of love; and yet his anger burns, his lips are full of fury, and his tongue a consuming fire. For even as love attracts that to it which is like itself; so also it violently rejects that which is unlike. Hence Jesus also, on the day of final judgment, will say, “Depart from me, ye evil doers; I never knew you.” Even as he also said to Satan, “Get thee behind me.”

The salutation or blessing of real Christians is likewise something salutary and powerful, when it is bestowed as it ought, with a believing elevation of the heart to God through Christ. We believe in the communion of saints. It consists not merely in that sincere and heartfelt love which so infallibly prevails amongst real Christians, that John adduces it as a cha-

racteristic of having passed from death unto life ; and adds, " He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." It consists not merely in contributing to their support with our outward substance, and ministering to them with our spiritual gifts, such as instruction, encouragement, and consolation ; but we have also reason to believe that our labour is not in vain in the Lord, when you bless me in spirit, and I, in return, bless you, and when we mutually supplicate for each other grace and salvation from God. For the Lord fulfils the desire of them that fear him. Nay, it is even a reciprocal duty. " Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," it is said in Psalm cxxii.—an expression synonymous with wishing prosperity to it. " They shall prosper that love thee." " We bless you in the name of the Lord," is the conclusion of Psalm cxxix. And Paul says, " Pray for one another ;" and also requests the intercessions of the church on his own behalf. Let us also mutually exercise this, that the body of Christ may be edified. Our blessing, however, is powerless in itself, and is only effectual when our hearts are incited to it by the Lord, and accord with His will.

Jacob desires to be blest by the Lord himself; and the blessing of the Lord does not consist in mere words, but in the real communication of grace and gifts. The Lord left this world whilst lifting up his hands in the act of blessing; but we do not read that he uttered any thing on the occasion. He imparted real life to his disciples; which enabled them to return to Jerusalem without the visible presence of Jesus—not with sorrow, but with joy.

Every thing, in the kingdom of God, has reference to that which is real and substantial. The world, on the contrary, is a kingdom of falsehood. It promises pleasure and delight, and even rest; but it does not keep its word. What it gives is shadow, which may for a season deceive, so that the mistaken individual himself imagines that he is wonderfully well satisfied. But before he is aware, the delusive prospect fades from his view, and he finds himself enveloped in darkness. The world deprives him again of all the dignities, pleasures, property, and happiness it had afforded him, in order to bestow them upon others. It pays no attention to his ardent desire for the further possession and enjoyment of them, nor to his great

unwillingness to part with them. Inexorable death deprives him of every thing ; reduces him to dust ; and hurries him, naked and bare, into another world, where he meets with none of the objects which had been lent him for a time ; where the man in authority is no longer respected, and where the rich man no longer possesses anything ; because nothing avails then, but the new creature, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, which he does not possess ; and in faith, which worketh by love, of which he is destitute. Poor deceived mortal !

Thus the world is a kingdom of lies, and we ourselves are also full of deceit, which misleads the understanding as well as the desire to seek happiness in vanity. Hence the individual must be born again ; from being carnal, must become spiritual ; from being earthly, must become heavenly ; and from being an unbeliever, must become a believer ; and thus enter into the kingdom of God, which consists solely of truth and reality. When, in the latter, anything is termed good or evil, it is really so, and will manifest itself to be so. The things are really as it describes them. When it says, ' Seek

that !' it is really worth while. When it says, 'Set not your affections upon that particular object,' it is not worth the while striving for it. In short, it always advises us for the best. Its promises also are true and sure. When it says, 'The blood of Christ cleanses the conscience from all sin, and renders us happy,' it proves itself to be so in our minds ; even as many thousands, in every age, have found it confirmed in their own experience. If it tells us, 'The Lord careth for you,' it proves that it is the case in all who receive the saying. Its joys are real and substantial ; and when once it will appear what we shall be, all our expectations will be exceeded. In short,

" Who seeks this world, a burden finds,
Which firmly on his back he binds.
Upon the chaff and wind he feeds,
And a most wretched life he leads,
Until at length he feels, too late,
The misery of such a fate.
A friend in need, in death a stay,
A comfort, during all the way,
Unfailing, thou wilt find in none,
On earth or heaven, but God alone."

With all its wisdom, the world is nothing but deceit, when it presumes to put in its word

upon spiritual things, because it knows nothing of Christ. But upon him who enters into the kingdom of God, the true and marvellous light arises, and he sees what was otherwise hidden from his eyes. When Jesus blesses, he actually imparts "all things that pertain to life and godliness."

What is it, therefore, that we call blessing ? It is the opposite of curse. As the latter comprehends in it all that is evil, with respect to body and soul, in time and eternity ; so blessing, on the contrary, comprises in it all inward and outward temporal and spiritual prosperity. Outward prosperity, that is, perfect health, disturbed by no sickness, pain, or indisposition ; in the enjoyment of which, the body possesses all possible perfection, so that no weariness oppresses it, no tedium troubles it, and every sense is capable of uninterrupted and exalted enjoyment. We must certainly take into account, at the same time, the infinite period after the resurrection ; but in the kingdom of God a thousand years pass for a day, and Jesus, as a perfect Saviour, renders at length both body and soul perfectly healthy and happy ; as an in-

fallible pledge of which we know that he himself dwells in heaven with body and soul.

Blessing, in a spiritual sense, is a perfectly tranquillized mind, an understanding endowed with all perception, a heart thoroughly pervaded by God, and entirely one with God, which may be experienced, even here below, in a good measure. It is true, we live here by faith and not by sight, and are saved and sanctified by hope, and are not yet in perfect possession and enjoyment. The blessing, the life, however, which takes its commencement here, is an eternal blessing, an eternal life; and becomes in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Let it suffice you, that you are kept, by the power of God, through faith unto salvation; and that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven, and that a mansion is already prepared for you. The heavenly Joshua is able to conduct you through the wilderness, and not to let you want either bread or water; and even if you must have flesh, he knows how to procure it; only take care to leave the world its onions and its garlic.

What has been premised sufficiently proves, that blessing comprehends in it the entire appropriation of salvation, from the first gentle inclination of the man's will towards God—of which he himself may perhaps be unconscious—to perfect felicity before the throne of the Lamb; from the being called with a holy calling to the being glorified in heaven; for it is one blessing, something entire. Hence Paul represents it, in Rom. viii., as in a chain or series of blessings; “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Earthly benefits are also a species of blessing, which certainly ought not to be overlooked. The abundant harvest of the present year forcibly draws our attention to this view of the subject. The field and the garden preach to us concerning the goodness of God, by presenting us with the enjoyment of it, with respect to which we ought not to be unsusceptible, but to lift up our eyes to the God of blessing, who opens

his liberal hand, and satisfies the desire of every living thing, and on whom our temporal prosperity as much depends as our spiritual. But we call whatever belongs to our temporal prosperity only a species of blessing; because even the wicked partake of it, whilst the godly not unfrequently obtain only a small share. God causes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and his rain to descend on the just and the unjust. Temporal benefits are only a curse to the wicked; and in the end they fall into the most bitter poverty, as we see in the example of the rich man. What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What avails all participation in the things of the present world, without having part in that which is to come? And how lamentable is the folly of neglecting eternal blessings, whilst seeking after transitory good; and yet, alas! how common!

The triune God is the source of all blessing. "The Lord bless thee and keep thee! The Lord cause his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee! The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon thee, and grant thee peace!" From him as the Father of lights,

comes down every good and perfect gift. No man can receive anything, except it be given him of the Father. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy, and of his free will. It is in vain to rise early and sit up late, unless the Lord give his blessing with it. In vain is the watchfulness of the watchman, unless the Lord keep the city; or the industry of the builder, unless the Lord co-operate. With all his rapidity, the swift may fail in the race, because he either applies it too early or too late. With all his ability, the merchant may miscalculate, and fail notwithstanding all his prudence. Strength alone is not sufficient to secure victory in the combat, nor does expertness in anything render the individual acceptable.

Success belongs to a jurisdiction which receives no laws from princes, since they are themselves the subjects of that which men call time and chance; but we Christians, "Divine Providence." Be careful for nothing, and know at least that it is of no avail. The case is the same with spiritual things, and in a still greater degree. The Lord bless thee! Thou art then blessed indeed.

The real cause of blessing is Christ crucified—his priesthood—and, primarily, his expiring on the cross. The blessing had departed from us, and it was necessary to regain it for us. The curse had come upon us, and must be removed. Both were too great and too difficult for us to accomplish. The price was such, that we should never have been able to procure it. God then sent his Son into the world. He came attired in such a manner that no one regarded him for what he really was but he to whom the Father revealed it. A simple son of man, in fashion as other men, few only beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. In the form of a servant, it was easy to take him for any thing else than the Lord from heaven. And what was the end of him? He died in the flower of his years—died without having apparently accomplished any thing—died in the most wretched, painful, and ignominious manner, as a condemned malefactor, as a defamer of Divine and human majesty, and was buried. What shall we say to these things? The disciples knew not what to say, and wept. The Jews thought they understood it. 'If he

were not a malefactor ; if there were any truth in the thing ; if it were only half true what he affirmed as entirely so with an oath, that he was the Son of God ; he could not possibly have been crucified.' But a mystery lay, and lies, in the whole affair—a mystery that was hidden from the beginning of the world ; but which is revealed to us by the Apostles ; a mystery which was unknown to the rulers of this world ; a wisdom of God with them that are perfect ; in one word, the mystery of the cross of Christ. And what mystery is that ? Paul declares it in Gal. iii. 13, when he says, " Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us, which is proved by the manner of his death ; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And Christ hung upon the tree, that we might receive the blessing already promised to Abraham. Jesus is therefore, by virtue of his death, the true high priest, who pronounces the blessing upon us ; from Him we must seek it, even as Jacob did.

But what are the means for obtaining the blessing ? Not works. If you seek it thus, you will nevertheless continue under the curse

(Gal. iii. 10) ; and though you torment yourselves day and night, you will advance no further. Jacob had also wrestled mightily ; and such must be the case, and it must be continued with all earnestness, as long as we are able to accomplish anything. At length we are obliged to stand still. Jacob had at last no alternative, after his thigh was put out of joint, than passively to cast himself upon the neck of the Son of God ; and then only it was that " he blessed him there."

By faith, says Paul elsewhere, we are to receive the promised Spirit ; and calls the Galatians, who had understood it otherwise, foolish and bewitched. Read the chapter in which this occurs—yea, the whole Epistle ; but do it as a humble scholar, do it with a prayerful looking unto the Lord, that you may learn from himself the true method of becoming a partaker of his blessing ; for our own reason will be here of no avail, but the sentiment conveyed in the words, " I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

We need say little respecting the necessity of this blessing. It might be imagined, that

every one would clearly perceive it. Or are ye the people, who, after having sown or planted any thing, can yourselves cause it to spring up and increase? Or are there princes anywhere, to whom we may apply, in order to obtain sunshine, rain, or healthy seasons? Are you yourselves the wise, and able, and powerful people on whom the direction of success and the seasons depends? If so, we will confess that you are little gods. Can you impart to yourselves the impulse to all that is good, and hatred to all that is evil? Are you able to expel from yourselves sin, self-love, envy, self-interest, and unbelief? Can you render yourselves meek, humble, benevolent, patient, heavenly minded? If so, we must confess that you are really the whole that need not a physician, and the righteous, who require no repentance; confess that you have some other progenitor than Adam the sinner, and that consequently you can reasonably do without the second Adam; that Paul's assertion, that "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," does not extend to you; and that you make an unheard-of exception. As for us, we believe that it is God who

worketh us both to will and to do ; that we are not sufficient as of ourselves to think anything good, but that our sufficiency is of God ; are of opinion that it is the work of God, when we believe on the name of the Son of God ; and think that Jesus is quite in the right, when he says, " Ye are not able to make a single hair, either white or black."

When we call ourselves sinners, we do so because we really know not by what other term to designate ourselves, and thus nothing is left us but to have recourse to Him, on whose neck Jacob hung ; and to declare with him, " I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me !" Do you know any better way ? God himself said, " I know of none."

Finally, we have still to remark the possibility of obtaining this blessing, and the certainty of it for all who are of Abraham's faith. " Seek, and ye shall find." This cannot be said with so much certainty of earthly blessings, otherwise we should have a greater number of rich people. But with respect to this blessing, we are empowered by supreme authority, even by the King of kings, to assert that he that seeketh findeth. Let him therefore, who esteems

it a matter of importance, betake himself to the search ; and let him who is seeking it, say with Jacob, " I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Of this, therefore, we have still to speak ; but this we will leave till another time.

See to it, therefore, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. There is something terrible in the words, " He refused the blessing, and chose the curse, therefore it shall come upon him." Terrible are the words which are spoken of every transgressor of the law : " Let him be accursed." " This people that knoweth not the law is accursed."

Beware of esteeming earthly blessings too highly, and spiritual ones too meanly ; and know that you have long lain under the curse, unless you believe in Jesus Christ. See to it betimes, that the sentence of death and damnation already pronounced upon you be not executed, and that by the mediation of Christ it be transformed into a sentence of justification unto life. What will otherwise become of you ? Wrestle for the blessing like Jacob, with all your strength, and with all your energy. Say, I must and will know how it stands with reference to my soul's salvation ; otherwise I

will not rest. You will never repent the labour, although it may be painful to you, even as Jacob also experienced labour and pain. But how glorious was the result; when it is said, "He blessed him there." How happy you will esteem yourselves; with what thankfulness and joy you will point out the hour, the opportunity, the place, where you will be assured of the blessing, become partakers of it, and be translated from the kingdom of lies into the kingdom of truth, and yourselves experience its wonders! The Lord will then remain with you, and guide you safely through the wilderness, until at length you are present with the Lord. Amen.

SERMON V.

GENESIS XXXII. 26.

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh.

And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

ON a recent occasion, we considered the former part of the subject contained in the words of our text. We have still to meditate upon the conduct of Jacob expressed in the words, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

This blessing comprises in it, generally speaking, the appropriation of the salvation purchased by Christ, from its first scarcely perceptible commencement in the individual, to its completion in heaven; from the first inclination of the will towards God and his truth, to

the standing before the throne of the Lamb ; from the anxious inquiry, " What must I do to be saved ? " to the being satisfied with Divine felicity as with a stream ; in which appropriation there is a commencement, a continuation, and a completion observable.

Jacob expresses a strong and ardent desire for this blessing. He does not however mean its first beginnings ; for he had no doubt of the favour of God, of the forgiveness of his sins, and that the renewing of the Divine image had already been commenced in him. He had no doubt of the validity of the blessing received from his father, although not in an entirely correct manner ; since not only his father, but God himself, had confirmed it. He had not the smallest hesitation with regard to the Divine sealing of the promise he had received, but appeals to it, in the twelfth verse, with all boldness. He did not consider himself as one in whom the Lord had hitherto had no pleasure, but, although entirely unworthy of it, as the favoured object of his mercy and loving kindness, of which he had received the most visible and affecting proofs.

But still he was not satisfied. He longed to

be blessed in a superior, more inward, and profound manner than before. And the Lord himself had excited this desire, this hunger, and this longing within him. The Lord had awakened in him the feeling of necessity for a superior blessing, for a more substantial impartation of grace. He had inflicted a deep wound upon him, not only outwardly but inwardly also, which rendered him desirous of being healed. He could no longer exist in the manner he had done hitherto, nor be any longer satisfied with his state of grace. He wished for more. From being Jacob, he desired to become Israel. The eagle felt its wings, and wished to soar aloft with them. It was with him as with the grain of wheat in the lap of earth, whose germ bursts the husk, and springs forth. He felt as though what had been said to his grandfather Abraham, had been also said to him: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect; for I will make a covenant between me and thee." From being a youth he wished to become a man.

When a soul is called from an inferior to a higher state of grace, and to a more perfect faith, and when Christ is to be more completely formed in the soul, a certain pressure

precedes it. This was also the case with Jacob ; and the Lord employed a variety of means to produce in him this necessity for and craving after a superior communication of grace and blessing. He first gave him the command to return to the land of Canaan, where his father dwelt, and also his brother Esau, and gradually conducted him to the scene of conflict where we have hitherto contemplated him, and where wonderful but glorious things occurred to him. In Mesopotamia he had no reason to trouble himself about his brother's fury, although he had something to suffer from the covetousness of his father-in-law ; but now he himself, with all that was dear and valuable to him, was at stake, and he was cast, as it were, to the lions. It was not his own choice ; for this would have been fool-hardy, and he would have been unable, in this case, to have made God his confident. It was the Lord's own guidance. To this Jacob appeals in the ninth verse, "Thou saidst unto me, Return unto thy country." The Lord had also promised him, saying, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest " (ch. xxviii. 15). His own reason and his own will would have been

no good guide, nor do they lead any one aright. Hence the promise is, "I will guide thee with mine eye;" "I will lead thee into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto thee" (Hosea ii. 14). Hence David prays, "Let thy good spirit lead me on a plain path;" and again, "Turn from me every false way, and grant me thy statutes."

However, Jacob was not enabled to conduct himself under these circumstances, on approaching his brother, in a manner consistent with the promises he had received. By the Lord's wise permission, a dreadful fear of his enraged brother takes possession of his soul, and under its influence he acts, in some respects, too much like a natural man; but in others, in an exemplary manner. The feeling of fear was not only painful in itself, but one might have supposed it could not have seized such a man as Jacob. Doubtless he himself regarded it as something unbecoming, improper, and even absurd, and for which there was no cause, and by giving way to which he might act derogatorily to the faithfulness, power, and promise of the Lord. But these considerations were insufficient to tranquillize him; his reason looked too

much at that which was seen, and too little at that which is invisible—too much upon Esau, too little upon God; and he could not divest himself of it. And what was the result?—a struggle, and the desire that the Son would make him free. Until he obtained this, he acted with too much human prudence. Hence his humble message to his brother. Hence his submissive and excessive courteousness, in commanding Esau to be always called his Lord, but himself his servant; hence the prudent division of his family and his flocks into two parts, in order to save at least one of them; hence the placing the present intended for him in the first rank, and the instructing all his domestics to address Esau in a highly complimentary manner. He did everything to rid himself of his fear, and yet it is said, “Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.” And certainly, it was not for him to deliver himself from it; this honour belongs to the Son of God alone. Jacob’s anxiety was doubtless rendered still more painful, by the reproaches of his enlightened understanding on account of it, which prescribed an entirely different line of conduct to him, and a deportment consistent with the

many proofs of Divine favour which he had received, and which were similar to those expressed by David in Psalm xci. : "Though a thousand should fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, yet it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. No evil shall befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling, for he hath given his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." How much had Jacob in his favour!—his father's blessing, which God himself had confirmed; the remarkable vision of the heavenly ladder during his flight; and the glorious promise of the blessing, which should extend itself to all nations through the medium of his posterity.

The many temporal blessings which the Lord had bestowed upon him in such a visible manner, during his residence with Laban; the express command to return, with the promise of protection; the wonderful change produced in Laban, who, notwithstanding his furious rage, was not permitted to speak an unkind word to him; the meeting of a host of protecting angels at Mahanaim; and yet to be the subject of fear—

of such great fear—was evidently not right, was a proof that Jacob did not yet possess a perfect faith ; that he had not apprehended this golden chain of promises as he ought. There were promises enough, but not sufficient faith. “ He that feareth,” says John, 1 Ep. iv. 18, “ is not made perfect in love. Fear hath torment ; but perfect love casteth out fear.” Perfect faith does not make haste, nor does it flee, through fear. He that can say with the Psalmist, “ God is my refuge and strength ”—can also say, “ Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” But Jacob had not yet attained to this standing ; we must beware, however, of supposing that perhaps only a single saint in a century attains to it, and that it cannot be attained by others because we ourselves have not yet arrived at it. For such thoughts are base, derogatory to God and his grace, and resting-places for the flesh.

Jacob was conscious that his faith was not in accordance with the promise. All his prudent measures were unable in the smallest degree to expel his fear, which laughed, like Job’s leviathan, at the shaking of the spear. All his en-

deavours to compose and tranquillize his mind were fruitless, and only increased his fear and disturbance, instead of lessening it. O happy failure of his own, self-potent striving to help and amend himself ! Happy is he whose own strength, wisdom, and righteousness is dislocated in the struggle, and who has no other alternative than to cast himself entirely into the arms of Jesus !

Thus it fared with Jacob. His distressing condition outwardly, and his still greater inward distress, which he was unable of himself to remove, compelled him to have recourse to the Lord by prayer ; in which he unfolds the state of his mind, and candidly confesses that he was afraid of his brother Esau. At the same time he intreats a superior communication of grace. Perhaps it was more in the manner of groanings which cannot be uttered, than of clearly experienced and plainly expressed requests—a moaning of the new creature—which against its will lay in bondage to vanity—after the glorious liberty of the children of God ; a longing after something better, of which he could not himself form any clear conception.

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But He who searcheth the heart, well knew what was the mind of the spirit. He himself had implanted in him this superior hunger after righteousness, and produced this urgency of spirit in him. Even as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so his soul panted after God. His soul thirsted for God, for the living God, that he might come and appear before God, to see his power and his glory, so as he had seen it in the sanctuary. His heart would have delighted to have been able to praise the Lord with joyful lips. He sought retirement. He prayed and wept, as Hosea says ; he could not properly say what he required ; it was not merely fear, but also its peculiar source, of which he wished to be divested. His heart, not yet established in perfect faith, and still unable properly to apprehend God in his promises, travailed, as it were, in the spiritual birth—as the Saviour says—by which something new was to be produced in the soul.

But it was only after the Lord had laid hold of him in such a manner, that his travail really commenced. The Lord himself struggled with him. His sin and unworthiness was deeply

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unfolded to him; but at the same time his cleaving to the Lord, and his craving for a blessing, became so urgent that he could not refrain, whatever might be the result. Although in the most wretched plight, and deprived of all strength, he still exclaimed, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me? I cannot possibly let thee go without it; I will and must have a special blessing.'

The Lord was also willing to impart it, and he therefore prepared him for it, by depriving him of every other support, that the Lord himself might be his rod and his staff. He divested him of all strength, that he might find it in the Son of God alone. It was necessary that he should feel the impossibility of expelling fear, notwithstanding the Divine promise which had been given, and likewise that he might seek and expect the changing of his heart, the pacifying of his soul, and everything else from the Lord alone. He decreased, and Christ increased; he became little and nothing, that the Lord might be great, might be all; thus on his dying-bed he was able to confess and say, "He hath redeemed me from all evil," and not I myself; even as he ex-

pressed his whole inward state in the words, "O Lord, I wait for thy salvation!"

In a similar manner the Lord has acted towards others, to whom he intended to manifest his glory more fully. Take, for example, the disciples. The Lord had still much to say to them, but they could not then bear it, they were not able to apprehend it. It would have appeared irrational to them; they could not have received it; the Saviour therefore was wisely silent, and had patience, until the Spirit should come and lead them into all truth. But what took place in their souls before this more glorious manifestation of Christ? The Lord himself hints at it in John xvi. 21, where he says, "A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now, therefore, have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." And Paul says to the Galatians, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you." The disciples, in consequence of the sufferings

of Jesus, were themselves plunged into profound and unwonted suffering. The entire edifice of their hopes was overthrown, and nothing remained but the foundation which God himself had laid in them. But the other foundation of sinful nature also manifested itself in them, in a manner they could not have believed. They had long indeed regarded themselves as sinners ; but, at the same time, as far better men than they were now obliged to acknowledge. They were offended at Jesus, who had, nevertheless, pronounced him blessed who should not be offended in him ; they were offended at Jesus, although they had regarded it as impossible ; and therefore pertinaciously contradicted him, when he told them beforehand, that such would be the case. ‘ That will never happen,’ answered they, ‘ we are too much devoted to thee.’ But when put to the test, they all forsook him, and endeavoured to keep it a secret that they had ever been his disciples ; they were afraid of their Esau-brethren, and apprehensive lest their mother’s children should smite them ; nay, they even began to consider their hope, that Jesus would deliver Israel, as groundless, and to suppose that the Jews had succeeded in their devices against him to an extent he had not anticipated.

All this took place in their old man, in their natural heart and understanding. But what was the new man doing meanwhile? It mourned and wept, as Jesus had predicted; it travailed in birth, but there was no strength to bring forth. It would gladly have elevated itself to a higher degree of faith; but both the requisite power and light were wanting for this purpose. They mourned and wept in the distress and anxiety of their hearts, and were like a ship upon the stormy sea, tossed hither and thither by the waves, without an anchor, and without any harbour in sight. There was an end to the cause of Jesus, and to them along with it. A man wrestled with them, to drive them from the spot, and to confuse them with respect to God, to Jesus, to the kingdom of God, to all the promises, and to themselves. The Bridegroom was taken away from them, and the time to fast had arrived. But what followed? A superior manifestation of the glory of Christ; a view which they had not previously possessed; a faith, of which they were before ignorant; a knowledge of the Scriptures, of which they had till then been deficient; a humility and a confidence, a resignation and a wisdom, to which they had before been utter strangers.

“ I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction,” says the Lord, by the prophet (Isa. xlviii. 10). He who desires to be raised with Christ, must first be taken captive with him in the garden of Gethsemane ; bound round about with grief, so that he cannot move, that he may be absolved before a Divine and human tribunal ; be condemned by the law and his conscience, that he may be pronounced righteous ; and be crucified and slain, in order that he may live unto God. True felicity does not consist in words, but in the fruits of repentance and faith ; in the essential experience both of sin and grace ; of self and the living God. Such is also the experience of all those Christians who are predestinated and called to become conformed to the Son of God. After they have passed through the first stage of repentance—after entering through the narrow gate into the kingdom of God—after being joyfully assured of the forgiveness of sins, and believing in Christ and his grace—much is given them to enjoy. The Bridegroom is with the children of the bride chamber ; therefore how can they mourn ? A beautiful robe is put upon them, and shoes on their feet : a feast is prepared, and singing

and dancing are heard. Their assurance of their state of grace is firm ; their joy is heartfelt ; and they say to others also, " Come hither, ye that seek God ; " they feel a power which induces them to use the confident language of Paul, " In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us ; " a courage which shuns no reproach of the world, no suffering, no death, no devil ; a heavenly-mindedness, which feels a disgust at all that is vain ; a relish for reading the Scriptures, that induces them to break off many an hour even from sleep ; a delight in prayer, so that hours fly like moments, and they leave it with regret ; a communication of grace, which their mortal tabernacle is scarcely able to endure ; a readiness to suffer, which makes them willing to beg their bread, and to give all they have to the poor ; a disgust at sin, which borders upon indignation ; a facility in every good work, which causes them heartily to recommend the yoke of Christ as easy and his burden as light. O how happy do they then feel ! They think they must tell it to every one, that others may also set out in quest of such a felicity ; they desire that all should possess it, and even torment

the still unconverted members of their households with unceasing persuasions to be converted : just as if it were the work of man ; and they exclaim, " Ho, all the world, come hither ! here ye may see that God is gracious without any merit of your own ! " If experienced Christians put in a word, and tell them that a change will take place with them, they cannot believe it. But how should they fast, as long as the Bridegroom is with them ? Rather call unto them, and say, " Rejoice, thy King cometh ! " The Lord, by his only-begotten Son, has caused their mountain to stand strong. They say, We shall never be afraid ; but when He hides his face, they are troubled. This is, as it were, the welcome on entering the kingdom of God. Like the children of Israel, after their departure from Egypt, and their passage through the Red Sea, they come to Elim, with its twelve fountains of water, and its seventy palm trees, and encamp there. But from thence the whole congregation removes into the desert, which leads them to Sinai (Exod. xvi.) The refreshing seasons decline, and often intermit with times of great barrenness. The individual at one time feels great strength, and

finds himself at another in the most deplorable impotency. At one time he possesses great courage, and at another the same degree of timidity ; at one time he can call Jesus his, and at another not ; at one time he feels himself very able to make a sacred surrender of himself, and at another by no means disposed for it. He at length becomes extremely weary of this continual vicissitude, and inquires if it be impossible for the heart to be established ; if only a Paul could say, " I know in whom I have believed," and am persuaded and assured ; if that faith be unattainable which the Apostle describes as the " substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ;" if we ought not in the present day, according to the rule laid down by the Apostle John, to believe the love which God has towards us in Christ, and experience that fear is not in love, and must be expelled by the latter ; and if we may have boldness even in the day of judgment : and then he asks, ' Shall I only be unable to attain to it, seeing that with God nothing is impossible, although in myself I am incompetent to any thing that is good, and inclined to all that is evil ? Is that state of grace, described by the Apostle, no longer

attainable in the present day, in which the individual is free from an evil conscience, and is able to come boldly to a throne of grace; and where he speaks of a rest in God, and a cleaving to the Lord, by means of which we become one spirit with him?' In short, he is compelled to believe that there is something higher, more glorious, and blissful in religion, than what he, or even others, have yet experienced; and he feels within him an ardent longing after this substantial and permanent state, although he sees and acknowledges himself unworthy of it: although it rests with the Lord's free grace whether he be pleased to lead him out of his present straitened and contracted position into greater liberty; and he counts those elect souls particularly happy, who through grace have attained to it; from whence he learns to believe, that the most honour is frequently put upon those members which are thought to be less honourable, and that no one has reason to despair on account of his unworthiness, because the reward is not of works, but of grace.

Those souls, which in an especial manner hunger and thirst after righteousness, and to

whom the promise is given that they shall be satisfied, experience a disgust, a certain dissatisfaction with their former standing in godliness; and in all their good exercises, they feel much poverty, and can no longer continue them in their customary manner; they see too clearly the self-love and self-righteousness which intermingle themselves in everything; they detest their own working, although they cannot yet give it up; they also perceive that pleasing feelings do not constitute the essential part of religion. They languish until the Son makes them truly free, till salvation shall come upon Israel out of Zion, and the Lord deliver his captive people. The man here obtains a much deeper insight into the corruption and depravity of his own heart, into that dreadful self-love and self-righteousness which pervades us, into the amazing unbelief in which we are immersed, and is compelled to consider all that proceeds from himself as a mere hindrance. The case is now the same with him as with Jacob, when his hip was out of joint, and when he was thus deprived of all ability to stand and to continue the combat; so that only the choice was left him either to fall helpless into the hands of

his infuriated brother, or to cast himself upon the neck of his opponent. Nothing now remains for him but to place his hope and confidence entirely upon the Lord, and to say with Jacob, 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me—bless me with a superior light than has hitherto shone upon me, by which I may duly view thee, my Saviour, as elevated upon the cross, with a stedfast peace, which shall keep my heart and mind in Christ Jesus, instead of the constant mental disturbance I have hitherto experienced ; with a complete faith, which receives out of thy fulness grace upon grace, and abides in thee as the branch in the vine ; which affords an entire and constant assent to the work of redemption, and perseveres in it, so that I have a sure confidence that thou wilt bless me with such a real fellowship and intercourse with thee, as to enable me to pray without ceasing, offer thanks unto thee, and thus glorify thee.'

Such is Jacob's prayer, "I will not let thee go,"—a prayer to be used not only in the beginning, but also in the progress of the life of grace. Happy is he who employs it in both cases, and to whom light rises in darkness !

May the Lord bestow his blessing upon us

all ; begin his work in those souls where it is not yet commenced ; and where it is already begun, carry it on until the dawning of the perfect day. May complete knowledge and faith, a perfect cure and perfect love, be, by grace, the lot of all of us ! Amen.

SERMON VI.

GENESIS XXXII. 27.

And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

JACOB had assured the Lord, that he would not let him go, without first receiving his blessing; and, in the words of our text, we find the preparation for the reception of that which he desired. The Lord's sole intention was to impart to the Patriarch a superior blessing to anything he had previously enjoyed. But observe what a singular way he takes for this purpose. It seems as if he intended his entire ruin—nay, it not only seems so, but is so in reality. Jacob is driven more and more into straits. He is afraid of Esau, and the promises he has received, no longer serve to tranquillize his mind.

In this way, many an individual miscalculates, upon whom the promises are impressed in a particularly lively manner. He looks upon them as a capital, upon which he can draw in the season of distress, and carefully notes them down, in order to refresh and encourage himself with them when he requires it. But the manna thus laid up, refuses to perform its office. The word, indeed, continues the same; but, as the Spirit is not with it, it produces no more effect than in the case of Jacob, who was afraid notwithstanding; and this is likewise productive of good.

In the most pitiable situation, and whilst hanging on the neck of his opponent, his desire for a superior blessing is increased; and it is then suggested to him, to let *him* go, who can alone bestow it. Thus it may also seem, as if Jesus did not trouble himself about the grief of soul which the individual experiences, and it seems as if he would be suffered to remain in it. But the Lord's intention is to make the man thoroughly acquainted with the real source from whence every blessing flows, deeply to convince him of the insufficiency of all self amendment, and to heal him of it.

Jacob now implores a blessing, but he does not receive it instantaneously ; for the Lord enters into a conversation with him, which causes delay. Pious souls must also be satisfied to wait in like manner. They easily suppose, that when they have prayed once or a few times, with earnestness and fervour, for some particular blessing, it must immediately be bestowed, or else they become apprehensive that their prayer is not of the right kind, and their state of grace uncertain. But, friend, though thou knowest it not, thou art perhaps not yet poor—not yet humbled enough. Look at Jacob ! When does he conquer ? When is he blest ? Only when his hip is dislocated, and no more strength is left him. Probably the Lord intends by it “ that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when he is pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done.” Thou must, therefore, force thyself to be content, whether thou wilt or not.

“ And he said unto him, What is thy name ?” Who was it that asked the question ? It is remarkable, that in 1 King’s xviii. 31, it is said, that “ the word of the Lord” uttered this. We

call this remarkable, because John, as is well known, calls the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, by this appellation. We are, however, already acquainted with the inquirer.

He asks the name of the Patriarch—not from ignorance, as if he knew not his name, since he had known and loved him from everlasting, and by his providence had so arranged it, that this name should be given him ; and he put the question for Jacob's sake, in order to instruct him respecting the signification of his name, and to induce him to reflect upon the occasion of its being given him ; which was, that at his birth, he held his twin brother Esau by the heel. His birth reminded him of the word of the Lord, which had been spoken to his mother—“The elder shall serve the younger ;” which Rebecca had certainly not concealed from him, but had probably made the chief inducement for him to consent to the surreptitious mode of obtaining the blessing in preference to his brother Esau. But if Jacob had forgotten, the Lord was not unmindful of it ; if Jacob could not cleave firmly to it, the Lord held himself bound by it : “For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall

not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed."

The Patriarch was to derive encouragement also from the signification of his name. It means a supplanter. Hence his brother said of him, after he had deprived him of his father's blessing, "Is not he rightly named Jacob, for he hath supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold now he hath taken away my blessing." (Gen. xxvii. 36.) This name ought therefore to have imparted courage and confidence to the Patriarch, that Esau would not overcome him. But when we are in difficulties and darkness, what do we think of? Chiefly of that only which is calculated to increase them—the law and its threatenings; and if we call the promises to mind, they take no effect, however sweet they may have been to us.

Jacob might also think thus with himself: 'How canst thou derive encouragement from thy name, which chance and human choice has given thee? If God himself had ordered thee to be called so, the case would have been different.' Thus many act also with the promises. They think that they only accidentally occur

to them ; that they have read or heard them somewhere, or learnt them by heart. But it would be strange, and at the same time a loss to the diligent readers of the Scriptures, if they were not at liberty to derive benefit from those promises, with which they are already acquainted. David acted otherwise. He pleaded the Lord's word with him, and then expected, in a prayerful frame, its fulfilment. But why should promises be suggested to us, if we are not enabled, at the same time, duly to act upon them ?

Jacob perhaps also thought, " Why this question ? I ask for a blessing, and he inquires my name. I should have preferred no such delay, but the immediate fulfilment of the desire of my heart ! " But he was nevertheless obliged to consent to it. God does all things well in due time, and this must be waited for, however inconvenient it may be. Mary said, " They have no wine ; " and received for answer, " My hour is not yet come. " Strange arrangements are then made ; wine is wanted, and large vessels are filled with water ; but in the end, wine is furnished of the best quality. It often goes to great lengths, before a very favourable result. The sick daughter of Jairus dies before

Jesus affords his aid. Lazarus not only dies but putrefies, before it is manifest that his sickness was not unto death. The individual imagines that his help is arrived, and begins to sing hymns of praise ; but whilst supposing that the path will now lead to the right, his guide turns to the left, until he at length learns to let himself be led, without seeing before him, or caring whether the pillar of cloud and of fire goes forward or rests.

“ What is thy name ? ” Was the Lord ignorant of it ? and if not, why did he ask, and appear as if he knew it not ? We may well ask, ‘ Why does the Lord often seem to renounce his own attributes, and suffer us to pray and cry as though he heard us not ; even as the Syro-phœnician woman cried long before a sound was given her in reply ? But how does this agree with his promise in Psalm l. 15 : “ Call upon me in the day of trouble ; I will deliver thee.” And that in Isaiah lxx. 24 : “ Before they call I will answer.” If he is so full of mercy and compassion, why does he exercise many with the severest sufferings, and heed neither cries nor tears ? If his ability is so great and his strength so inexhaustible, why does his church

still find reason to complain : " O thou the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why art thou as a stranger in the land, and as one that tarrieth but for a night ? Why art thou as a man astonished, and as a strong man that cannot help ? Yet thou, Lord, art in the midst of us, and thy name is invoked by us " (Jer. xiv. 8, 9). David prays, " Look upon my affliction," as if the Lord did not sympathize in it. The being placed in such circumstances may well occasion grievous pain, and yet they are certainly not without excellent fruit, though it be sown in tears. Although the Lord may act as a stranger for a time, yet we must not let this surprise us ; for he has the best intentions towards us.

" My name is Jacob," answered the Patriarch, in the simplicity of his heart. How simple and childlike may we converse with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Friend ; particularly under the New Testament dispensation, in which, not a servile, but a filial spirit reigns, whereby we cry, Abba, Father ! There is nothing that we are not permitted to tell him and complain of ; nor need they be always matters of importance—they may be also trifling things, for a mother listens

gladly to the lisping of her children. How wisely we act, when we apply to him under every circumstance, and say to him, in few words or in many, 'I am at a loss; I need advice; what shall I do? how shall I act in the most proper manner?' This might well be called holding converse with the Lord; habituating ourselves to him.

"My name is Jacob." If the Lord knew the name of Cyrus, the heathen king, and named him a century and a half before his birth, how much more may we believe that he knows his children according to their names, residences, situation, necessities, and circumstances. If he has numbered the hairs of their heads, shall he leave more important matters unnoticed?

When Jacob told him his name, a new light probably rose upon it, that rendered its signification clear to him in a pleasing manner, and strengthened his faith. For it often requires only a little word to shed light and peace in the soul, and whole sermons may be heard, whole volumes read, and yet the individual may continue unedified, as the Lord pleases. Many a one is childish enough to think, "If I had but heard this sooner; if it had only occurred

to me sooner." But when the time arrives, the help we previously sought in vain, comes also. Jacob now found an encouragement in his name, which he had not perceived before ; and thence saw likewise, that in our gloomy hours, everything is hid from us, which might have encouraged, and which was otherwise so clear as to be almost tangible to us. We then foolishly imagine we shall never doubt or despond again. But what have we left, when he hides his face ? The lamp of our souls burns only as long as the heavenly householder feeds it with oil. We cannot ascribe anything to ourselves ; all that is good remains the Lord's property, over which he retains the right of disposal. According to Heb. viii. 3, he is a minister of the true sanctuary. No man can receive anything, except it be given him from heaven. " So God ascended from Jacob," it is said in ch. xxxvi. 13, and did not suffer himself to be detained. To this we gradually accustom ourselves, and are only glad that the Lord is that he is, however much he may change ; nay, in the end we perceive that we are in no respect more, when adorned with his gifts, or less when he withdraws them from us.

"My name is Jacob," said the Patriarch. His parents had given him this name at his circumcision, and whatever it might signify, it reminded him of the covenant of grace, of which circumcision was the seal, and the substance of which was the promise, "I am thy God." In this respect, we enjoy the same privilege with Jacob. The names which were given us at our baptism, are to us this seal of the new covenant, which rests upon far more excellent promises. An ambassador in Christ's stead has named us, and sealed the new covenant to us in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. What more do we require or wish for? What bold claims we may found upon God even from our names, since they remind us of the covenant which God, for Christ's sake, has established with us. We are sinners, it is true; but it is also true, that Christ is willing to wash us with his blood and Spirit from all our sins, and renew our natures after his image. But certainly it is a great insult, for a person to bear the name, and yet disregard the covenant. Happy is he whom God brings into such straits, and presses so closely, that he is glad to take refuge in the covenant of grace,

and seek the real communication of the glorious blessings which are promised him by it. Lo ! God is willing to be thy Father, and thou shalt be his child. All that the Son of God has purchased by his sufferings and death, shall be thy own. The holy spirit shall be thy teacher and comforter. How is it possible, therefore, that thy salvation should not be perfect, since the sacred Trinity itself has undertaken its accomplishment ? Be ashamed of thy unbelief.

Jacob doubtless also felt a sacred confusion, when reflecting on the uncommon condescension of God, in entering into such a glorious alliance with such a worm, in which he in reality requires nothing, although the contrary may seem to be the case—and is willing to give everything ; and when he says, “ Walk before me and be thou perfect, he first directs the eye of faith to himself as the all-sufficient God. He is willing to care for us, to cleanse us from our sins, and to instruct and comfort us. We therefore need only keep our minds in a tranquil frame ; and even if we are incapable of doing so, he will also bestow this upon us. We are encouraged to cast all our care upon him,

and if we cannot rid ourselves of care, we are permitted to inquire and say, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" (Psalm xiii. 2.) "Ask of me," says the Lord, "and I will give thee the heathen for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession." (Psalm ii. 8.) What a gracious alliance is this, in which everything is promised! Well may it be said, "I am not worthy of all the mercy and the faithfulness thou has manifested towards me." Who does not feel a desire to enter into such a precious covenant, in which it is said, "Blessed are the poor, for their's is the kingdom of heaven! Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" and in which only the rich and those that are full have no part. When this is duly perceived, it plunges us into the sweetest confusion, and excites a gratitude of a very peculiar kind. "For I saw thee lying in thy blood, and said unto thee, Live!" Wonderful mercy!

Jacob felt also a sacred confusion at his timidity. 'What,' he would think, 'if God be

for us, who can be against us! If Esau had four thousand men instead of four hundred, what could he do to me? God himself has been unable to prevail against me, because his omnipotence could not act otherwise than in accordance with his promise, "I will do thee good." 'O,' he would think, 'how little do I know him—how little do I still apprehend of him! What am I without his light, but darkness itself—without his grace, but weakness itself? And what am I in him? I have all and enough!' How he would finally feel, when he reflected and thought, 'who gave me courage for the conflict, and strength to persevere?' How wise was the whole mode of treatment! Truly he might well call the place a Peniel. And humble souls still experience things of a similar nature.

"My name is Jacob," said the Patriarch. And what are we called? Our names are, in some respects, very disgraceful, and in others very consolatory and even glorious.

Our names sound very disgraceful; and because they are given us by the true and faithful word, we cannot deny their correctness, without making the true God a liar; and what

a horrible sin would that be? But what are we called? Oh, we might adduce a long catalogue of such evil names—we are reprov'd as being unrighteous sinners, ungodly backsliders, and disobedient; and many other such evil titles are applied to us.

What shall we do in this case? Deny them? This would be only rendering them still more heinous. Caring not for them will also not avail; for those names carry all of them their sentence along with them. We ought not to be indifferent to them, but they ought to produce in us a troubled spirit, and to render us humble and contrite in heart; until we are induced to confess our transgressions to the Lord, justify him in opposition to ourselves, and confess that we are what these names indicate, and nothing else. He is then faithful, and will strengthen us, and preserve us from the evil one. But ah! how much is requisite before we attain to this. How many attempts are usually made, in order that we may deserve the appellation of pious, and what distress and sorrow it occasions when we do not succeed! We strive to rid ourselves of our sins by praying, struggling, and distressing ourselves.

And such attempts are the more useful, the more earnest they are; for by them the individual learns to know himself the more thoroughly, to seek his salvation in Christ the more exclusively, and to believe, with the greater confidence on him who justifies the ungodly. But certain it is, that if we wish to understand the name of Jesus, we can do so in no other manner than by previously becoming well acquainted with our own name of 'Sinner.' The more fully we assent to the latter, the more inestimable will the name of Jesus be to us, who alone can save the sinner.

When this name has once become truly precious to us, the consolatory names which are applied to us will also refresh us. And which are they? The name of sinner stands foremost here also, as a very consolatory appellation. But in what respect? If God himself calls us by this name, he proves by it that he expects nothing else from us, as of ourselves, but what is in accordance with this name, and thereby encourages us to present ourselves before him in our poverty and nakedness. And what promises are connected with it! so that in reality I need be nothing but a sinner to appropriate to

myself the most glorious things ; for the name of Jesus stands opposite to it, with the promise to save such characters ; and this is a faithful saying. When this becomes apparent to the troubled mind, that which previously distressed it, will impart courage to it, and it will find in Jesus all that it sought for in vain in itself. If he saves sinners, they will certainly be saved, or else Jesus is no perfect Saviour. The more, therefore, a person feels and knows himself to be a sinner, the greater confidence may he have that Jesus will save him from all his sin and misery.

How consolatory, in a certain sense, is the appellation of ungodly — for God pronounces them justified ; of lost—for Jesus seeks such characters ; of needy—for he will supply all their need ; of afflicted—for he will comfort them ; of captives—for he liberates them. In short, if we can only apprehend Jesus at the same time, all these names will only serve to encourage us. If Jesus therefore asks what we are called ; and we can reply in simplicity, and with a full assent, that we are sinners ; a lovely light will rise upon us, even as upon Jacob, on mentioning his name. But if we resist, if we

seek to have a hand in saving ourselves, and refuse to entrust ourselves solely to Jesus—we shall find nothing but wretchedness and sorrow of heart in our way. But the practice of this is not so easy as it appears. Only make the attempt, and you will find it to be so. We are much too wise, proud, and righteous in our own esteem, and many a stroke of the hammer of the law is requisite, before the rock of our heart is broken.

But those who, renouncing everything of their own, seek everything in Jesus, bear at the same time more glorious appellations, which are written in heaven. One of the most excellent names which they bear, and which comprises in it every other glory, and is perfectly Scriptural, is that of Christians. We read that God changed the names of Abraham and Sarah, by adding to them a letter from his own name, Jehovah, by which he received them into a degree of fellowship with his glory. But by our being called Christians, we are placed in fellowship and relationship with Christ; and this implies much. With respect to ourselves, we are sinners; but in Christ we are righteous before God: in ourselves we are weak; but united

with Christ, we are strong and invincible : in us, we are wretched ; in him we are happy and glorified. But the mere imagining the thing, is here of no avail—it must be truth and reality. What, therefore, is thy name ? But art thou that which thou callest thyself ? If so, what happiness is thine ! Christ must be dethroned, sooner than anything evil can befall thee. If the Lord is thy shepherd, thou shalt not want. Amen.

SERMON VII.

“ No one is crowned, except he strive lawfully,” observes Paul, in writing to Timothy (2 Ep. ii. 5). This he said in reference to the Grecian games. An individual might have used the greatest efforts in striving ; yet if these were not in accordance with the rules and laws of the conflict, he did not obtain the prize, however much he excelled in other respects. Such is also the case in the spiritual course. Augustine says, “ Halting forward upon the right path brings us further than running out of it ;” and this expresses, in other words, the meaning of Paul. A person may strive against that which is evil ; he may use great exertion ; he may even seem to accomplish great things, and yet all be in vain, because his efforts are not in accordance with the rules of the spiritual conflict. “ I fight,” says the Apostle, “ not as one that beateth the air,” by which no man is wounded.

What should we expect to effect in natural things if we used improper weapons ; and endeavoured, for instance, to destroy bees with the sword ; which is effected only by smoke : or if we did not use our weapons in a proper manner, and expected to wound our foes with the hilt, instead of the blade of the sword ? It is certain, that in the spiritual conflict, persons frequently act thus inconsistently, and therefore accomplish nothing in reality, even when they appear to succeed, or else are conscious that they do not really hit the enemy. And are not the frequent complaints of the little which is effected, and the slow progress which is made in the spiritual course, all of them proofs that those who thus complain do not strive in a regular manner ? He that does not, will not obtain the crown, as his own conscience already tells him. The enemy will always renew the challenge, and mock at him. He will perceive that there is some cursed thing in him, in whatever it may consist, and hence he cannot stand against his foe. And this accursed thing is so deeply hidden, that the man himself does not perceive it, until the Holy Spirit reveals it to him, and shews him, at the same time, wherein

he is deficient, which is a great mercy, since it is also connected with instruction how he ought to fight, in order to gain one victory after another, and to go from strength to strength. When Jesus calls his yoke easy and his burden light, every complaint of religion being a wearisome thing only proves that we do not rightly understand the taking upon ourselves his yoke. And yet many seem to think more highly of complaints in religion, than of thankfulness; and of anxiety, than of peace. We betake ourselves to the conflict, without considering whether it is advisable with ten thousand men to oppose him who comes against us with twenty thousand; and whether it be not more prudent, either to make peace with him, while he is still afar off; or, if that cannot be, to look about us betimes for a powerful ally. Jehoshaphat acted thus. "In us," said he, "there is no strength; for we know not what we ought to do." But instead of despondingly complaining, he adds, "But our eyes look unto thee, O Lord!"

Let us consider our combatant Jacob, and see whether we can learn of him how to strive aright.

GENESIS XXXII. 28.

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

WE recently considered the question put by the Lord, "What is thy name?" and the direct reply of the Patriarch; "and he said, Jacob." The Lord now gives him a new name, and says, "Thou shalt no longer be called Jacob, but Israel," and mentions the reason for it; "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

By names, we indicate persons and things, in order to distinguish them from others. If the thing becomes changed, it also receives another name. Water when frozen, we term ice, snow, and hail; when it falls from heaven—rain; when it descends at night upon the plants—dew; and when it dissolves into small particles—mist.

Man, according to his age, receives the name of a child, a youth, a man, and an old man. With reference to God and his kingdom, he is either a sinner, a wicked man, or even a child

of the devil and an enemy of God ; or else he is an awakened person, a penitent, a believer, a righteous man, a saint, a perfect man, a child and heir of God. Some true Christians are called children ; some, young men ; and others, fathers. Some are called carnal, others spiritual. The disciples, whilst Jesus was with them, could not bear many things of which they were afterwards susceptible ; and until that time, Jesus was silent, though he told them of their limited state. Paul says to the Corinthians : “ Hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual ; but as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk.” Hitherto the Patriarch Jacob had been called a supplanter ; and this name corresponded more with his defective state of grace up to that period, than that which was now appropriated to him. He had held his enemy as it were by the heel, but had not previously overcome him. He had received glorious promises, but could not duly tranquillize himself with them. He still looked too much at the things which were seen—at his brother and his four hundred men ; at the misfortune which might possibly befall him, and at

his defenceless condition. He was still too prudent, and lingered too much at natural causes and effects ; and hence he regarded it as possible, that he, together with his children, might be slain, although God had assured him that through him and his posterity, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He felt a great degree of fear : and John says, " He that feareth is not made perfect in love." But still, he was a real child of God, and would therefore have been saved, if he had not attained to that higher standing to which the purpose of God had predestinated, and also called and prepared him.

The Apostle says to the Corinthians, in a tone of reproach, " Now ye are full." There is certainly, even on this side eternity, a being blissfully satisfied, which is promised to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The soul of the righteous shall not suffer hunger. " I shall not want," says the Patriarch. " It is enough," said Israel. But that satiety which is injurious, is when a Christian is so satisfied with his state of grace, that he supposes he has experienced everything that is to be experienced, and judges every thing according to his expe-

rience ; and that with so much self-love, as if every thing that was above and beyond it was imaginary. This is a great mistake, and entirely opposed to poverty of spirit. Paul therefore says also, " Whosoever thinketh himself to be something whilst he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." If we are really nothing, we must learn to know ourselves as such ; and this is just the chief thing. " He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." He that supposes he knows any thing, is still ignorant of every thing ; and thus it is with other things. Only look at Jacob. In which way did he become Israel ? In that of humility. Every support was taken away from him, his hip was dislocated, and, instead of every other stay, the Son of God is alone left him ; and unless he is willing to fall into the hands of his enemy, he must throw himself into the arms of the angel of the covenant. And at the moment when all is over with him, he conquers. His former name was now no longer suitable for him. The Lord had vouchsafed him superior grace ; the gold of his faith was more purified from the dross attached to it ; and thus he obtained a new name.

“ Thy name shall be called no more Jacob.”

Fear shall never again take possession of thy heart in the same degree, because thy soul will cleave to me, and thus imbibe my vivifying and peaceful influences. Thou shalt never more experience such great vicissitudes of fear and hope, anxiety and joy; thou shalt be more perfect in me!

People often miscalculate in their religious course. If they have happily escaped from a gloomy vale, and again rejoice in their state of grace; if the mists of doubt disappear before the lovely beams of the Sun of Righteousness, they often think they have now attained, and believe that in future they will not be so timid. But does not a degree of presumption lie in such an idea, as if the individual could do this or that of himself? and Jesus, who has said, "Without me ye can do nothing," is too jealous of his honour, and of the maintaining of his promises, of his Jesus-name, to endure such presumption in his favourites. He will therefore sit as a refiner, and purify the sons of Levi, even as gold and silver is purified, until his gold attains the purity he has intended. Perhaps he dislocates their thigh, and brings them into such straits that they feel incompetent to strive,

without Him, against a doubt, whether great or small; and are compelled to give full assent to his assertion, that they can do *nothing*.

But what then? "Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel:" this is that magnificent title which no one ever bore except Jacob. It means, a prince of God! God makes a show of Jacob, as it were, and boasts of him, because through him he had accomplished so much. Thus God acts also towards his people, when he says, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob! I will help thee. Thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small like chaff." If a worm can thresh mountains, it is only possible through God, who receives all the honour of it. Thus Jesus boasts respecting his sheep, 'that they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of his hands.' This excites the world, together with the hosts of hell. The most specious errors, the vilest temptations, fire, sword, martyrdom, imprisonment, and death, are called forth to see whether defenceless sheep cannot be destroyed. Whole hosts of wolves attack them; and what do they accomplish? Nothing; except that they prove the faithfulness of Jesus, and increase his fame.

And here even God strives with a weak and sinful man, and cannot overcome him ! " In all these things we come off more than conquerors, through Him that hath loved us."

"Thou shalt be called Israel." What are all the titles, however high-sounding, which men may bear ? They dissolve, at length, into smoke and vapour, of which the age in which we live has furnished astonishing proofs. In themselves they are no protection ; least of all against the wrath of God, to whom that which is highly esteemed amongst men is an abomination ; and who chooses, by preference, that which is weak, simple, despised, and nothing, that he may confound that which is wise, mighty, and noble ; yea and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are ; that no flesh may glory in his presence, and that the abundant power may be of God, and not of us. What a foolish direction is given to the ambitious feeling implanted in us by God, when we seek honour from men, instead of that which cometh from God ; when we seek earthly possessions, and are not rich in God ! A bruised reed in the kingdom of God, is more than those who are regarded in the world as stately oaks ; and

a glimmering taper in the temple of Jesus Christ, more than burning torches out of it. Esau far exceeded Jacob in earthly possessions. He could take the field with four hundred men, and his sons were princes. But God loved Jacob, and not Esau. Of what avail, therefore, was all his superiority? Be not deceived, for that is only valuable which appears so in the eyes of God.

“Thou shalt be called Israel.” The Patriarch doubtless received this name with reference to the remarkable individual whose progenitor he was to be, and in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed—Jesus Christ, to whom the name of “Prince of God” peculiarly belongs. It is also said in Jer. xxx. 21, “Their prince shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them, and he shall approach unto me.” King, Prince of Life, Lord of Glory, are his titles; “And upon his vesture and his thigh he has a name written, King of kings.” He indeed strove with God, with men, and with devils, and overcame, and has received a name which is above every name. Without his conflict, all our wrestling would be lost labour: but through him we come off more than conquerors.

The wondrous man also adduces the reason why he changed the name of Jacob into Israel; "For," says he, "as a prince thou has power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The name Jacob—supplanter—was also a very instructive and encouraging name; but the Patriarch, from want of light, had not found much encouragement in it: hence the Lord gives him the requisite instruction respecting his new name. "In thy light," says the Psalmist, "we see light;" and prays, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." We require the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, not less than the disciples of the Lord, who nevertheless enjoyed his instruction. Without his light, "We see men, at the best, only as trees walking;" and therefore indistinctly and confusedly. Hence Paul not only taught, but prayed also, that the Ephesians might comprehend the height, and breadth, and depth, and length of the love of God.

God bears witness to Jacob that he had wrestled; and we have been spectators of the conflict. He had engaged in the contest with all the energy—outwardly of his body, inwardly

of his will. And thus it ought to be. The slothful man dies over his wishes, and his hands refuse to labour. Let such a one go to the ant, and learn of that little insect, if he cannot see it in Jacob, how to exert all his strength, and employ every means. Let him do his utmost, and not lie down to sleep too soon upon the pillow of human inability, which he is acquainted with only from hearsay. Jacob would certainly not have received the new name, if he had immediately fled, under the idea that he had no power to resist. But he was compelled to struggle, because his life was now at stake. How many are there who take up the words of Jesus, and say, 'We can do nothing without him,' without really believing it, because they have never tried how far their own strength extends. Assuredly the Scripture does not call upon us in vain to strive and fight, to fear and be diligent, to work and do violence; and these things are equally as true, as that "in quietness and confidence shall be our strength." "I write unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth with you; for ye have overcome the wicked one." However, every thing has its time. What has been

said, has reference to the first station, if I may so speak, on the journey to Jerusalem ; " Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work ; but on the seventh, the sabbath of the Lord, thou shalt rest."

Such was Jacob's case. He wrestled and strove ; but at length his struggling was at an end, since his thigh, the soundness of which was indispensable to his wrestling, was dislocated. There was now an end to his striving, because he had no strength left. He then fell into the arms of his God ; and conquered then, and not before ; he was blessed then, and not till then. Fight therefore, O man ! who desirest to be saved. Fight with all thy might. Do not give way a hair's breadth. Watch, pray, read, and hear. For lo ! Esau marches against thee with four hundred men ! With four hundred men ! —and Jacob was alone. Dangerous situation ! For what assistance could he derive from his wives, his children, or his shepherds ? He was compelled to fight with men. To Mesopotamia he dared not return ; for God would not have it. Proceed he could not. What fool-hardiness, to march out alone, against four hundred men ! Therefore weep, and lament, and mourn,

and despair !' Not so. He believed in an Almighty and merciful God ; he believed in his promise, " I will do thee good." However his faith was at that time not sufficiently strong to enable him to say, " Though a host should encamp against me, I will not be afraid"—or to think and say with calmness, ' God who enjoined Laban to speak no otherwise than kindly to me, is still the same, and is able and willing to turn the heart of Esau in such a manner, that he shall be unable to act cruelly towards me, seeing that God hath promised, that in my descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' Could he have acted thus, how glorious would it have been ! But this was not in accordance with his previous state of grace. He was afraid, because his reason still reflected too much, and looked more at the things which are seen, than at those which are not seen. But his faith was the victory which overcame the world. This faith softened his heart, so that he wept, as Hosea says ; and much is already gained, when we acquire a contrite spirit, and when the hard heart dissolves. His faith opened his mind and his heart ; so that he was able to pray, as Hosea also informs us. His

faith took refuge with God. What ! shall God work a miracle ? How miserable, to be only able to oppose prayer to four hundred armed men ! Certainly this is not rational, but still it is of faith. And to the believer are given all the promises of a living God, who overrules all natural and accidental events according to His good pleasure.

It was thus he wrestled with men, in the most prudent manner, by taking God to his aid against them ; for if God be for us, who can be against us ? And oh, how evangelically wise we all act, when we commence our spiritual conflict—not in our own wisdom and strength, but draw the Lord himself, by faith and prayer, into the conflict ; he will then fight for us, whilst we shall hold our peace. If we go out to the battle without God ; if we think that in our own wisdom and strength we are sufficiently equipped—we should act as foolishly, as if Jacob had believed that he alone was able to face four hundred men ; and that which we think we have accomplished, is only self-deception. But with God, it might be all one to Jacob, whether his brother came out against him with four hundred or four thousand men. For he that with-

out Christ can do nothing, with him can do all things; and it is the same to the Lord, to help with many or with few.

Thus Jacob wrestled, like a prince, against men. He did not despair on account of the might and multitude of those who were against him, and looked not at his littleness and inability. Nor did he trust to the fragile staff of his own strength, which indeed he was unable to do; for it was broken. Reason showed him nothing but ruin and death, and nature was afraid, but faith helped him through. By its means, he honoured God as able to help, where there is no other aid; and although he did not understand by what means, yet he left this with God's all comprehensive wisdom. He said, 'Wilt thou not do it, Lord? I know no other measure, and can do nothing more, and see myself compelled to resign myself to thee and thy good pleasure, with all that are mine, and what thou hast otherwise given me. Do with me, therefore, as seemeth thee good.'

Nature, indeed, trembles, when it feels compelled to seek help of God, because it is nowhere else to be found, and is more inclined to fear its total ruin, than to expect help and deli-

verance. But the Holy Spirit here turns the scale. He holds the soul fast, so that it declares, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!" This is the real inward conflict and travelling in birth, during which the soul cries to God, out of the depth of its distress, and then ascends on high, when the time arrives. This is in reality no trifle, and it may be said with Solomon, "A wounded spirit, who can bear!" But these are, at the same time, paths which terminate in the desired end:—"The Lord hath done great things for me, whereof I am glad."

"Thou hast had power with men, and hast prevailed," said the Lord to Israel. He came off more easily with Laban. He fled, and prudently took advantage of the absence of his father-in-law, as the fittest moment for his flight. However, that he might not ascribe all the success to his prudence, Laban ascertained his flight early enough to hasten after him. He did so, and took with him his brethren; which however did not betray the most friendly intentions towards Jacob, and overtook him on the seventh day. But God came to Jacob's aid, by a dream, in which he turned the heart of Laban

in such a manner, that he was not permitted to do him any harm, but only spoke harshly to him ; and at length retired, after taking a friendly leave. Jacob, in this instance, came off easily, and with a slight degree of terror ; for God usually leads his people step by step, and exercises those whom he calls to severer conflicts, previously in easier ones. For a period, they are able by their own strength and reflection to accomplish much : but at length both go to the bottom. Waves cover the little vessel, and the cry is heard, ' Master save ! we perish ! ' and then the help is near at hand.

Such was also the case with Jacob. After the departure of Laban, he was greatly comforted, and received a powerful invigoration to his faith ; for he was met by the angels of God. This circumstance was highly remarkable and encouraging ; and because the art of writing was at that time not understood, he called the place where it happened, ' Mahanaim,' the Lord's host : for when he saw the angels of God, he said, " This is God's host." This afterwards assisted him in his conflict. If any one is delivered out of six troubles, he cherishes the hope that in the seventh he shall not be for-

saken; "for experience worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed." Christ said to Peter: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Thus Jacob saw that God could at least send two hosts of angels to his aid. But when he was in straits, all sensible supports gradually gave way, and Jacob remained alone with God.

The affair with Esau was a much more serious one than that with Laban. But defenceless Jacob did not overcome even him by armour and weapons, not by humble messages, not by presents, nor any other means which his prudence might have dictated; but by his humble, believing prayer, or rather by God himself. God softened the heart of the infuriated Esau, who had sworn his brother's death, to such a degree, that when he came in sight of his brother, he ran to meet him, cordially embraced him, fell upon his neck, and wept. But Jacob saw in his brother the face of God. He perceived in his whole deportment the wonderful overruling power of God, who had blessed him. He saw with his eyes, in the most

striking manner, that a man's actions do not stand in his own power; that he can purpose saying something, and yet that it depends upon the Lord whether he is suffered to utter it. Jacob ascribed nothing of it to himself, as the consequence of his prudence; nor could he indeed do so. He gave God alone the glory, and saw in Esau's whole deportment only the power and faithfulness of God; he therefore bowed himself seven times to the earth, more before God than before his brother. Hence he called him his lord, as he was in reality. For naturally, Esau, with his four hundred men, could have done with Jacob what he pleased; although in reality only as God pleased. Thus, with his dislocated limb, through God's help, he overpowered Esau with his four hundred men.

But we will here break off. This is wrestling so as to gain the victory; for faith is the victory that overcometh the world. This does not take place in our own strength, nor to our own praise. God receives all the glory. "No one is crowned, except he strive lawfully." See to it, how you will stand against four hundred, or whether you are able to go forth

with ten thousand, against him who comes towards you with twenty thousand. But "if the Son shall make you free, then are ye free indeed."

SERMON VIII.

“ Is there no balm in Gilead—is there no physician there ? ” inquires the sorrowing prophet Jeremiah, ch. viii. 32. He previously complains of the lamentable state in which his people were placed—a state which would draw after it one still more lamentable. “ Where is the man,” he asks, “ who does not gladly rise again after his fall ? and who, after going astray, would not gladly return to the right path ? But this people hold fast deceit, and refuse to return ? ” However much understanding men may have in natural things, they manifest the very reverse in spiritual things. Even the birds of the air, as he observes in verse 7, put men to shame in this respect. At the same time they were haughty, and said, “ We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us ; ” which, however, they

did not understand. Self-conceited individuals refuse advice, and therefore cannot be assisted. But must this wretched state of things continue? Is there no physician there? Or if there is, is there any want of medicine? Oh no! A physician is there. He possesses all the requisite knowledge. He perfectly understands the method of cure. He is a faithful, patient, gentle, and a kind physician. He knows the nature and real seat of every disease; knows whether he ought to use the knife or the plaster; to cut, burn, or heal. A physician therefore is there; but is there a want of medicine—is there no balm in Gilead? Oh yes: this physician is at the same time the medicine; or if you will, his blood and spirit is the balm. Was he able formerly to heal every disease—he can do so still. Was he able, when on earth, to raise the dead—he does so still, as he has proved in the cases of many of you, and doubtless will continue to do so. Many amongst you are already healed; but why not all? Some suppose they need no physician; others do not think their diseases sufficiently dangerous, and endeavour to heal themselves, by which the evil is made worse; others prescribe to the physician the method in

which they wish to be treated. Some do not understand how to buy the balm ; and seek for money, although it is to be had for nought. The majority will not suffer themselves to be cured of their own piety, and even think the physician must promote it ; but they are much mistaken : “ He maketh sore and bindeth up ; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.”

GENESIS XXXII. 28.

For as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

WE lately considered how Jacob wrestled with God and with men, and prevailed. Let us now contemplate the manner of his struggling with God, and prevailing ; and consider,

I. The conflict, and

II. Its result.

“Thou hast power with God,” said he who had wrestled the whole night with Jacob. Unequal conflict ! God against man ! Unheard of, incredible result ! The man overcomes ! Jacob now learnt with whom he had had to do

—not with a foe, but with his best friend. How is the soul astonished, when at the end of the darkest paths, in which it was inclined to think that God had in wrath forgotten to be merciful, and to say, “Is his mercy clean gone for ever?” it perceives in these very paths the most striking condescension of the Lord, and the greatest kindness in a guidance which seemed only to aim at its destruction. Then indeed a wonderful and glorious morning dawns.

He wrestled with God. God, therefore, seemed in some respects not to be for him, but against him. God seemed not to be for him; for why was it otherwise with him with regard to Esau, than it had been with regard to Laban? Why did fear obtain such possession of his mind, without his being able to defend himself against it? Why did it not depart at his humble prayer and thanksgiving? If God intended to do him good, why did he expose him to so much danger—and he at the same time so defenceless? If he loved him, why did he ask him to let him go? And why did he put him so entirely to shame? If the Lord be with us, why is all this befallen us? This question of Gideon’s, the children of God are often inclined

to ask : ' If I am really regenerate, whence these sinful inclinations in me ? If the Lord loves me, why does he place me in these particular circumstances ? If my prayer is acceptable, why does it not produce greater effect ? If God is for me, why is there so much against me ? ' But the end of the ways of the Lord is better than their beginning, and the soul at length receives a very satisfactory answer to these questions.

The Lord, however, seemed to be entirely against Jacob ; against him with words ; for he must have said bitter things to him ; otherwise why did he weep ? as Hosea informs us. He must have reproached, reprovèd, rejected, and threatened him ; otherwise why did he entreat him ? Did he not, in after-times, compare the Canaanitish woman to a dog, and mention what was proper and improper in the treatment of such ? And is it not often the case with individuals, that when desirous of comforting themselves with a promise—a command, a threatening, a reproof meets them and snatches it away, as it were, from their lips ; and this continues until the covering of Moses falls off from the heart and the soul looks into the perfect law of liberty ;

until Christ becomes the end of the law ; till the whole of holy writ becomes a Testament, and the covenant of grace beams forth as such. But what is chiefly necessary in order to this ? The Lord plunges Jacob, in a certain sense, into despair, when he says ‘ Let me go—I will depart.’ And does he not often withdraw himself, whilst the soul resolves to cleave to him, whatever be the result ?

It did not rest in mere words : actions are added to them. He increases Jacob’s distress by wrestling with him ; and that so violently, that Jacob, according to the expression of Hosea, is obliged to resist with all his might. He chooses, for this purpose, the night, a season the most appalling of all ; and the period when Jacob’s distress had, besides that, reached a terrific height, and when his fear was great. By the dislocation of his thigh, he deprived him of all strength, and rendered it impossible for him to continue the conflict, although the ceasing from it was equally impossible. He caused him pain. He casts him, as it were, defenceless before his enemy, by making escape impracticable.

Jacob therefore found it necessary to defend

himself, and to strive against his adversary, be he who he might. And the Lord bears him witness that he had struggled with God, and had prevailed. With God? How wonderful! What!—does God act in such a manner with men? Does he so degrade himself as to wrestle with a man—as man against man? It is not credible! Not credible? Thou shalt see still greater and more unaccountable things than these. How wilt thou believe the latter, if the former are incredible to thee? Go to Bethlehem; there thou wilt find him lying in a manger, as a little needy infant. Go to Jerusalem; there thou wilt see him in the hands of the wicked, who nail him to the cross; there thou wilt behold him crucified between two malefactors, hear him complain of being forsaken of God, see him die, and witness his interment.

What sayest thou to these astonishing mysteries? If thou canst not believe the less, how will it be with the greater? Does God act thus towards men? Why should he not? If not a sparrow falls without the will of God, what do we think can befall the children of God without their Father's superintendence? Even the very hairs of our head are all numbered;

every one of them is precious to him ; and how can it be otherwise, since he has paid such an inestimable price for them ? How wonderful ! Does his love assume such a form as we here see it in the case of Jacob ? Does he distribute benefits in such a manner ? Does apparent injury also belong to his method of doing good ?

In what manner did Jacob wrestle with God ? Certainly not in the sense in which Stephen said to the Jews, “ Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, even as your fathers did, so do ye.” The Patriarch defended himself nōt merely by struggling with his body—this was only the effect ; the cause lay deeper, lay within ; and that was faith. This faith was not exactly a sensible faith, nor a perfectly satisfied faith—for he was afraid ; but distress excited it, and the best kind of faith is when the individual, in the consciousness of his utter poverty, does not look so much at his faith, as at Jesus. Faith is that which is Divine in the Christian ; which by a strong impulse seeks that which is Divine, and is invincible. It manifests itself in taking refuge with Christ under the strong attraction of the Father ; in not casting away our confidence, which has great recompence of

reward. Jacob clung with such firmness to the Divine promise, which his distress compelled him to do, that he was so little confused by the adverse conduct of the Lord as to refer him to his own promise, "I will do thee good," and adhere firmly to it.

Jacob wrestled with God, first, with the exertion of all his powers, in the most determined struggle, as long as he felt any power in himself; but this only served to convince him, that we do not gain the prize by our own efforts, and that the kingdom of peace is not taken by violence. This mode of wrestling was rendered impracticable to him, since he was deprived of the requisite power for it by the dislocation of his thigh. The conflict was now obliged to be continued in an entirely different manner—that is, by a passive conduct, which the circumstances pointed out. The paralyzed combatant had no alternative than that of casting himself into the arms of him who had thus disabled him, and instead of exerting himself, to let himself be carried; in other words—instead of caring for himself, to cast his burden upon the Lord—to believe, and to turn from the law to the Gospel. And when he began to do this,

the Lord saw that he could not prevail against him, and took his part. The struggle then assumed a very different aspect; it then became a reposing, such as Isaiah speaks of in ch. xxx. 7: "Their strength is to sit still;" and in another place, "In quietness shall be your strength."

Thus we see in Jacob how legal exertion at length gives way to the evangelical sabbath of repose; and that in the latter, that is attained for nought and without labour, which is sought in vain from the most strenuous efforts; for according to Psalm cxxvii. 2, "He giveth it his beloved, sleeping." Wonderful! When Jacob was unable to struggle any longer, "the Lord saw that he prevailed not against him."

But why did God enter into such a conflict with Jacob?

First, because it pleased him. *Secondly*, to give a particular proof of his condescension, how minutely he concerns himself about his people—a subject of which our ungodly hearts so often doubt, and so seldom confide in, to the extent we ought, if we only give ear to the single injunction of the Apostle when he says, "Be careful for nothing." But the un-

believing corrupt nature requires one proof after another, and still remains incredulous ; as Job says, " If I had called and he had answered me, yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto my voice " (ch. ix. 16). We prefer caring for ourselves, although we accomplish nothing by it, and only occasion ourselves fruitless labour.

We have certainly much greater and more striking proofs of the uncommon condescension of God to man in the Holy Scriptures, than this to Jacob ; but the latter is not to be despised. When should we have done, were we only in some measure to go through the history of Jacob's posterity, both during their forty years' journey through the wilderness, and their actual residence in Canaan, in order to show how God often so visibly interfered ; and what would it avail the old man, who would have recourse to the subterfuge, ' though God did these things formerly, yet he does them no longer.' Just as if he either did nothing, or must do obvious miracles, and as if he were bound to one particular mode of acting. And even when miracles were really performed, there were prudent people enough, who said,

“Master, we would gladly see a separate sign from thee, which should not merely convince the vulgar, but us also.” “Ye shall have a sign,” replied the Master; “I will rise again after ye have slain me.” This took place; they knew of it in a manner which ought to have been perfectly satisfactory to them. But what did it avail? They continued in unbelief; for when the kingdom of God comes, outward phenomena do not contribute to it; unless the individual receives the spirit of faith, he does not believe though one rose from the dead. He that knows God, sees him not only in the thunder and the storm, or in manifest wonders, which certainly may compel even Egyptian magicians to acknowledge his hand; but also in the lot, and the hair of the head, and in events unimportant in themselves, by which he is the most honoured. God therefore gives, in this conflict with Jacob, a proof of his uncommon condescension.

It serves also, *thirdly*, as a representation to others of the ways by which the Lord may lead them, in a similar manner to Jacob. It is true, the Lord will scarcely think it needful to enter into a bodily conflict with any one, although he

is able, and really does, exercise his children by temporal occurrences. There are instances in which, from the time the individual was converted to God, success no longer attends him, but sicknesses or misfortunes befall himself or his family; nay, it may even be the case, that he himself is deprived of his natural ability to take charge of his affairs, and they fall into confusion, however much he may exert himself and however cautiously he may act; so that even in natural things he is put to shame. In his domestic and family circle, the words of Christ may be verified—"A man's foes are those of his own household." Quarrels may arise with respect to religion between husband and wife, parents and children, where unity previously prevailed. It may happen, that a person, on account of his religion, may become the object of an almost universal hatred, calumny, and ridicule; nay, he may be occasionally ill-treated, as was the case with the Holy One himself.

Generally speaking, those to whom the Lord is willing to manifest himself more intimately, as he did to Jacob, experience many trials and much adversity for a period; and at length an Esau stands in their way, who threatens them with de-

struction—nay, not only an Esau, but the Lord himself. They are brought low in themselves, that the Lord may be magnified. They desire to be holy, strong, righteous, wise, believing, and good; they pray and labour as much as possible; but instead of advancing forward, they go back. They increasingly exert themselves like Jacob; but only dislocate their limbs the more. Whatever they lay hold of, eludes their grasp; what they seek, they do not obtain. Jesus makes sinners of them without mercy, and their sin appears extremely sinful to them by means of the commandment, however much they may moan and groan on account of it. At length, their very hip is dislocated; they can no longer maintain their former footing; and nothing is left them but to yield themselves to the Son of God at discretion, and creep, as chickens, under his expanded wings. O glorious result, but highly disagreeable path to nature, to which nothing is left, and to which nothing ought to be left! Here it is manifest, that the mystery of godliness is great.

But what was the result of the conflict? It is described in the unparalleled words, “Thou hast had power with God, and hast prevailed,”

How absurd to reason ! How apparently impossible to prevail over God ! What strange things are related in the Scriptures ! Certainly they are strange ; no rational soul can deny it. How absurd it sounds, when it is said, for instance, “ He that will be wise, let him become a fool ;” “ God justifies the ungodly ;” “ When I am weak, then am I strong ;” “ Having nothing, yet possessing all things ;” “ I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners ;” and many more such paradoxical expressions ; on which account, Paul calls the whole Gospel foolishness, for which all that are wise, justly regard it ; but to us, who believe this foolishness, it is become the wisdom of God, and the power of God, after it is given us to believe it.

Jacob, therefore, gained the victory over God ; nay, he gained it of necessity. And why ? God could not strive with him as the Almighty, or as the Holy One, because he had bound his own hands by his truth, and by his promise, “ I will do thee good.” God had rendered it impossible for him to strive with Jacob in such a manner, as would have resulted in his ruin. This would have been at complete variance with his truth, the thoughts of peace he had towards

him, and with the whole contents of the covenant of grace, as well as the spiritual espousals of the Lord with his church. He could, therefore, only strive against him in love, and do him no further injury than the glory of God and Jacob's salvation necessarily required. Under these circumstances, therefore, Jacob could not fail to succeed. He saves sinners, and justifies the ungodly. Now, since he has said this himself, he cannot treat those who are sinners and ungodly in any other manner.

“As a prince thou hast had power with God.” Wherein consisted his princely conduct? He was sincere, and did not wish to appear before God better than he really was. He confessed his sins, by frankly owning that he was afraid. He believed the word which the Lord had spoken.

And oh, how much may such a sincere confession accomplish! When David at length said, “I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,” he forgave the iniquity of his sin. But as long as he kept silence, his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long (Psalm xxxii. 3—5). He prayed, and laid all his burden before the Lord, whilst seeking all his help from

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him, and not from himself. He believed, and that from faith to faith ; so that he suffered nothing to confuse him, and was bold enough at length to cast himself into the arms of his opponent, when every other mode of acting was rendered impracticable. And to him that believeth, all things are possible, even the overcoming God himself.

· Ah, but who is able to act in a similar manner to Jacob ?' Be it so ; but we must remark that the Hebrew language has something in it very peculiar ; so that it is not only said, "Thou hast prevailed," but at the same time, 'Thou art rendered fit, able, and competent, and wilt be made competent to prevail.' The whole affair is now clear. It is now conceivable how Jacob could have acted thus, although it would otherwise have been incomprehensible how a weak and sinful man could have conducted himself in such a manner. Now, the whole glory reverted, as it ought, to the Lord. It was sufficiently honourable for Jacob, that he was enabled to act thus ; and a cause of sufficient joy, that the Lord had thus condescended to him.

But what a *carte-blanche* for the future—

“Thou shalt be made competent!” What was left him, therefore, but to believe, to hang upon his neck, and suffer him to carry him!

How confidently might he now look forward to whatever might occur! If he had no sufficiency for it beforehand, he did not need it. “Take no thought what ye shall say, or what ye shall do; it shall be given you at the time what ye shall speak.” “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

SERMON IX.

THE Epistle of James is a remarkable piece of Holy Writ, although it is somewhat difficult to understand it aright. Its object is, that those whom he calls brethren, should be perfect and entire, wanting nothing ; and that their faith should be unfeigned. Hence he endeavours to overthrow all that is not sincere and genuine : and because trials are a blessed means for this purpose in the Father's hands, he wishes them to esteem it all joy when they fall into divers temptations, and counts him happy who endures the test. He then points out the source of every good and perfect gift, which is the Father alone ; and entreats them not to err in expecting any thing from any other quarter. He then recommends prayer ; because God giveth liberally, and upbraideth no one. Every one pretends that he prays ; but the Apostle inquires whether his

prayer possesses the true properties? Is it offered in faith? If not, let no one suppose that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. Faith, again, is a thing of which it is easy to say, 'I possess it.' Be it so; let us look at thy faith. The devils also believe, and Abraham likewise. Which of the two does thine resemble? Thou seest that with Abraham it was not a lifeless matter, but enabled him to offer up Isaac on the altar; and hence it is evident that a man is not justified by faith alone, but that justifying faith must necessarily be living faith, and the man must prove his faith by his works. If he does not, his faith is available neither before God nor man, nor even before the man's own conscience who says, "I believe," much less before the all-penetrating eyes of God.

But, says one, 'I have faith and works also;' these are again subjected to a test. Dost thou do all the good thou knowest to be such? For "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." But art thou deficient in no single point? For supposing that thou didst keep the whole law, and yet didst offend in one point, thou art guilty of all. How does it therefore stand with thee; espe-

cially with regard to love, this royal law? Does that which thou doest arise from compulsory motives, or to procure thy salvation? Thou probably judgest others, and art therefore not a doer, but a judge.

In this manner the Apostle shakes the foundation of every thing in its turn. He first of all attacks prayer, then faith, and then works. For what purpose? A house that is built on a rock must be able to withstand the winds and the waves; if it falls, the foundation is bad. "When a man is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." He mentions Jesus Christ only twice; and if we join with it the word Lord, only five times in the whole epistle; whilst Peter, in a much shorter one, names him upwards of twenty times. James acts in a proper manner with the kind of people he had before him. Nothing is effected by the mere talking about Christ, faith, and good works. The individual must first become acquainted with his natural state; his boasting of prayer, faith, and works, will then be at an end; and he will become wretched, so as to weep and mourn. When in this school, he must learn patience;

in due time he will also be able to look into the perfect law of liberty, and then be blessed in his deed.

We find this confirmed in the history of Jacob.

GENESIS XXXII. 29.

And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?

LET us more closely consider the meaning of these words, and investigate,

I. The Patriarch's inquiry; and,

II. The Lord's reply.

The Lord had asked Jacob how he was called, not as if he did not know it, but in order to give him a name more in accordance with his present state of grace. Jacob, meanwhile, feels emboldened to ask his antagonist his name. It may be that he was desirous of knowing how the Lord ought properly to be called. He was usually called "Elohim"—the Most High. God himself had said to Abraham, "I am the

El Shaddai, the almighty or all-sufficient God." He was also called simply El, the Strong One. But these appellations no longer satisfied the patriarch after his recent experience. They all expressed something of the Divine glory, but none of them the whole of it. There was probably an ardour in his soul, which would gladly have poured itself out in hymns of praise, but for which he could not find words. He that can worthily praise God, must be God himself. When the Son said, "Father, I thank thee," he was perfectly praised; but all the praises of all created things are called a silence, because they fall far short of their infinite object. It is like the praise of a little child, that commends some one for being wise or rich; but to which praise no one pays particular attention, because a little child knows so little what it is to be wise or rich. Such is the case with us in comparison with God. We are however able, on our part, to adduce a perfect praise of God, of which angels are incapable; since Jesus Christ, the God-man, is made unto us righteousness and sanctification, and we in him are the righteousness of God.

But Jacob doubtless was not anxious merely

about the name, when he said, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." I think he meant to say by it, 'Lord, how shall I call thee? I know not what to think, much less to say. Such a condescension as that which thou hast shewn to me, who am but dust, is more than my heart could have remotely anticipated. I know and confess, that thou, O Lord! art wonderful and gracious. I know how thou hast condescended to my forefather Abraham, and didst converse with him as one friend with another. I know that thou art wonderful, as thou didst shew thyself, when desiring my father Isaac as a sacrifice. I know, from my own experience, how gracious thou art. Thou didst once appear to me in a dream, and thou hast impressed promises upon my heart, which I cannot doubt proceed from thee. Thou hast blessed me outwardly, so that I am become a rich man. But what hast thou now done to me? Thou disguisest thyself in my flesh and blood, and becomest like one of us; thou feignest thyself to be my opponent, in order to do me good! Thou even wrestlest with me! Thou grieveest me, only to console me! Thou breakest down all my

strength, in order to declare that thou art in my power. Thou givest me a new name, which represents me as the conqueror and thee as the conquered, and which renders that which is impossible real. Thou art not ashamed to declare that I, a worm, have striven with God, and have prevailed; although all victory lies in thy hands. Thou entreatest me to let thee go; as if I could compel thee to remain, and to do what I please. It was thou who madest me competent to all this, and yet commendest me, as if I, a poor timid creature, had done it of myself. Thou, who art the Holy One, sufferest thyself to be embraced by my unholy arms; thou, who art Almighty, to be overcome by one so weak as I! This is too much, this is too wonderful and too lofty; I cannot comprehend it. Tell me, what is thy name? What shall I say of thee? for I know not. Who, indeed, can know how he ought to bless, praise, exalt, and extol thee as he ought, when he learns and is conscious of what thou doest to thy children?

If it had been said to Jacob, thus filled with God, 'This that the Lord hath now done unto thee, is something very trifling compared with

that which he is willing to do for thee. He has, in this instance, assumed the human form only for a short time; but in the fulness of time he will really be born of a woman, and not spend merely a few hours, but three and thirty years, upon earth; suffer in body and soul the most extreme anguish; and even die for Israel, that they may live. And the people will not meet him, as thou hast done, with prayers and tears, but with great wrath and bitter fury will they do him all conceivable injury; whilst He, from love, will bear it as a lamb.' If the Patriarch could then have been told these things—which were not fitted, however, for that period—'Oh,' he would have exclaimed, by God's grace, 'I can believe it! I can believe it! What can be too much for Him to perform?' Had he been told that he would be called Love, he would have exclaimed, 'That is his true name!' And who can say what an insight Jacob may have obtained into the mystery of salvation during this event, and of which he uttered many things in his parting blessing? At least, Jesus says of Abraham, "He saw my day, and was glad."

It is also certain, that when the Lord's peo-

ple have spent a period of profound trial and inward suffering, he is often wont to refresh them in a very especial manner. The darker and more anxious the previous night, the more reviving, the more ravishing is the light which succeeds; the more profound the complaint, the more exalted the praise; and the Lord is never more fervently praised, than by deeply humbled souls. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Psalm cii. 17). "Return unto thy rest, O my soul! for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. Thou hast loosed my bonds." (Psalm cxvi.) He perceives, in the humiliating paths by which he has been led, the faithfulness and kindness of the Lord, in the most particular manner. He finds that they lead to nothing but blessing, although he perhaps thought at the time, that, if the Lord loved him in any degree, he would have acted very differently. But now everything becomes clear to him, and he thinks he

will despond no more, however strangely it may go with him. But whether he will be able to keep his word or not, is another question ; certain it is, that when God withdraws his grace, nothing but sin and weakness is left us, and the being willing to learn this is also wisdom and grace. But ‘ tell me, I pray thee, thy name. Reveal thyself more intimately to my soul.’ Such a desire is very laudable. Christ declares that “ this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Paul found so much comprized in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that he regarded everything else in comparison with it as loss and dung. Moses also once experienced such a strong desire, that he prayed, saying, “ If I have now found grace in thy sight, I beseech thee show me thy glory.” And the Lord really granted him his request, as far as was possible.

In the Old Testament dispensation, the general inquiry was, “ Watchman, what of the night ? ” The prophets who prophesied of the grace, which was still to be revealed, searched diligently into the meaning of their predictions, and longed for the period, when the knowledge

of the Lord should become general. An acquaintance with all the blessings we have in Christ Jesus, invigorates faith, as Paul writes to Philemon; and it is very desirable that the morning star should arise in the dark place of our hearts, and the day dawn; that thus the path of the just may increase in brightness, even "as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. iv. 18.)

"I am known of mine," says Jesus. O glorious acquaintance, in which everything may be met with which can strengthen, delight, cheer, and tranquillize us, and which Jesus justly declares to be eternal life. An acquaintance, which is like an inexhaustible mine, from whence we receive grace upon grace; a knowledge, irrespective of which, there is no rest for the soul. The Old Testament church—and with it, the heart of the awakened individual—longs and languishes for light; until it is said to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God."

How can it fail, that he who finds an inward rest for his soul, and whose inward powers and faculties are collected from a state of multiplicity into a state of unity; who enjoys intimate intercourse with Jesus Christ, and is ac-

quainted with him as made of God unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption ; should be satisfied even in the midst of poverty and barrenness, since he has all in Christ ?

Who would not long for such an acquaintance, and pray, ' Make thyself known to me ; cause thy face to shine upon me ; make me acquainted with thee ! ' especially since we have the promise, " Thou shalt know the Lord. " Certainly, this is a pearl worthy of the whole of our poor property ; a treasure, for the sake of which, we may well sell every thing in order to obtain it. But it is only in the light of God that we see light. Blessed are the eyes which see what ye see. " Flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. " But as long as the Christian is not duly acquainted with his Lord and head, he feels like Noah's dove, which found no rest for her foot. If he finds rest, he is soon again disturbed ; if he thinks he possesses something, it is soon taken from him again, because he still desires to possess it in himself, and not in Christ ; if he falls into straits, he is again embarrassed as before ; for he still looks to

himself, because Moses and Elias have not yet disappeared, so as to leave Christ alone.

But the Lord replied, "Wherefore is it, that thou dost ask after my name?"—and with this he breaks off. This is strange! When Manoah, the father of Samson, besought him to tell him his name, he acted almost in a similar manner, and replied, "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" (Judges xiii. 18.) Moses also entreated him to tell him his name, in order that if the children of Israel should enquire what was the name of the God who had sent him, he might be able to give them an answer. To which the Lord replied in a singular manner, "I AM THAT I AM. Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." (Exod. iii. 13, 14.) God afterwards called himself Jehovah; which name comprehends in it the ideas, He is, was, and shall be, and of which God says, in chap. vi. 3, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them." But he was then desirous of being known and honoured under this title. In the days of Moses, the first syllable of this

name, "he shall be," was the most important. Hitherto he had revealed himself in an intimate manner only to individuals ; but then, he wished to show to all lands, and to the people of Israel in particular, by a multitude of great and mighty wonders, what kind of a being he was. They were to be continually in the full expectation of the things that should come to pass, until they should at length be able to exclaim, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," until the times should be fulfilled that he sent his Son.

But even in the New Testament, the name Jehovah—'he that shall come'—is still in operation. Hence it often appears in the revelations of St. John, not indeed as the word itself, but the translation of it, 'he that was, and is, and is to come ;' because the New Testament church also continually waits for new revelations of the glory of God in the hearts of the elect, and in the coming of his kingdom ; until at length, after the complete accomplishment of all the Divine counsels, and after the new Jerusalem shall have descended out of heaven from God, it shall be said, "It is done !" And, what will then occur, no eye hath ever

seen ; for this name Jehovah flows on through all eternity as a beatifying stream.

“ He was,” is the second syllable, and shews us that Moses preached to them, not a new, but the old unchangeable God. He is ever the same in himself, in his covenant, in his manifestations—a God of perfect blessedness ; whilst without him and his fellowship, there is nothing but delusion, deceit, and unhappiness.

But why does not the Lord answer Jacob’s question, since he himself excited it in his heart ? The Lord often acts in a manner according with his name “ Wonderful.” What was the reason why he said to Mary Magdalen, who by his appearing was most joyfully astonished, and doubtless fell upon the ground before him, in order to embrace his feet—why did he say to her, “ Touch me not ! for I am not yet ascended to my Father ; ” although, immediately afterwards, he suffered the other women whom he met, to touch him in this manner ? Why did he break off so unexpectedly from her, as here from Jacob ? Why did he vanish from the eyes of the two disciples in Emmaus, at the very moment when he made himself known to them, as if unwilling that they should express their feel-

ings towards him ; not to mention the singular answers which he frequently gave to the Jews : for instance, on their asking by what authority he did those things, he replied, " I will also ask you one thing ; and answer me." To their question, Who art thou then ? he replied, " Even I that speak unto you." At their urgent interrogatory, How long wilt thou keep us in suspense ; if thou art the Christ, tell us plainly ? he answered, " I have already told you, but ye believe not ; for ye are not of God." But frequently he told them far more than they wished to know, and were only offended by it.

His name is " Wonderful." Jacob, Mary, and the disciples at Emmaus, probably saw afterwards the wisdom of the behaviour of Jesus towards them, although it might appear strange to them at the time. If the Lord is willing fully to satisfy the desire which he has implanted in his children, he must make them partakers of the whole blessing, which he purchased for them on the cross. He is also willing to do this, according to his name, ' He that shall be ; ' not here below, but in paradise. Hence we must learn to be content and satisfied with our daily bread. Nor must

we be astonished, if, when enjoying some gracious communication, something all at once intervenes, whilst we believed more would have been added. Here we still dwell in Meseck, and are not yet at home in the Lord, but in patience wait for him. And this waiting is an essential part of religion, in which the Lord has exercised his church from the beginning even until now.

The Lord does all things well in due time, in general, as well as in particular—He only knows also the proper manner; and hence we must be content to be told, “my hour is not yet come.” Jacob’s question was also fully answered; eternity, however, is destined for its further elucidation. Israel thought he might then become acquainted with the whole mystery of redemption; but a couple of centuries must elapse ere it was fully made known. Israel was obliged to learn to wait—to see the promises afar off, and to be satisfied with it. He was satisfied, and held his peace.

This waiting continued until it was proclaimed, “Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people”—and then again, when it was said, “It is finished!”

the waiting recommenced, until it was said, "The Lord is risen indeed!" Again the people of God began to wait, and expressed their expectations in the question, "Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom unto Israel;" and were exercised by the reply, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." It therefore happened unto the disciples almost as it did to their forefather Jacob. Jesus ascended up into heaven, and the church was again instructed to wait, when the Lord sent word from heaven, saying, "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts i. 11.) Since that time it has continued to pray, for nearly two thousand years, 'Thy kingdom come!' Often indeed was the inquiry made, "Lord, wilt thou not at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" under the idea that it would be the case; but the same reply was again given, "To you it is not given to know either the day or the hour." It now continues quietly to wait, assured that He will accomplish it in his time. It must not be taken amiss of the church, that it has frequently miscalculated in its joy, and been compelled to wait afresh;

SERMON X.

WHEN Paul says, that his preaching consisted not in excellency of speech or of human wisdom, he states something that is applicable to the whole of Scripture, which presents to darkened reason a labyrinth, out of which it sees no outlet, and something that also very frequently applies to the ways in which God leads his people. What deep complaints are uttered by the man after God's own heart in Psalm xxxviii. ; from which, however, we will only adduce the tenth verse, where he says, " My strength faileth me." Strength is necessary in order to labour ; and he who does not possess it, is incapable of the latter. The Christian must labour much. He must watch, pray, deny himself ; preserve himself unspotted from the world ; lay aside the sin which so easily besets

him and renders him slothful, put on the armour of light ; believe—because without faith it is impossible to please God ; love—because only he that loveth abideth in God, and God in him ; in short, to say every thing in few words, he must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Let us not think to excuse ourselves with the idea that we are unable to do this ; for the debtor mentioned by our Lord, was delivered over to the tormentors, just because he was not able to pay.

David was able to do it. It is true, he never imagined he did it perfectly, but confessed that no one can understand his errors : yet he succeeded. What did *he* not possess, whom Saul called a stripling, whose form was more pleasing than great ; what courage did he possess, and how much did he accomplish ! A lion and a bear once attacked his flock, and carried off a lamb ; but the little beautiful boy ran after him, smote him, and rescued the lamb from his jaws ; and on its attacking himself, he caught it by the beard, smote it, and slew it. O pleasing type of Christ ! The fair and ruddy youth had courage enough to go forth against the Philistine, whose height was six cubits and a span,

when every one else fled before him. His brother Eliab angrily reproached him for being presumptuous, and thought he would do better to go and tend the few sheep in the wilderness. But it was not presumption ; it was confidence in the living God. The fair-faced courageous youth probably did not at that time anticipate that he should ever compose such a psalm as the 38th ; and lament in it that his strength failed him. If his strength had departed, he was no longer able to accomplish that which he could otherwise have performed, and which was at other times easy to him ; it was now become difficult, and even impracticable. " I am feeble, and sore broken," says he in verse 8 ; " I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart : " according to Psalm lxxvii., he was so troubled that he could not speak, much less accomplish anything. What was the reason of so much wretchedness ? His iniquity was the cause of it ; on which account he at length says, " I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are just, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me."

What was it that failed him ? Not *all* strength in the general, but his own strength. "*My*

strength faileth me." Before, he had been able to do much that was good ; but this is now at an end. No wonder that he began to be troubled about his sin. In verse 17, we are told he was ready to halt. This was a severe trial to self-love, self-righteousness, and to the life of self. But whom the Lord loveth, he overthrows in this manner, and gives them over unto death.

What was the result of this guidance ? He never obtained his own strength again, nor did he wish for it ; for God has no pleasure in the strength of a man. Nothing was left him, but to declare his iniquity, and to hope in the Lord ; who, according to Psalm lxxviii., gives his people might and power. His own strength was then no longer needed ; he was then strong when he was weak, and great by being humbled. Then he no longer said, ' I care ; ' but, " I lay me down and sleep in peace, for thou, Lord, only causest me to dwell in safety."

Strange beginning ! glorious end ! Such is also the case in the history of Jacob.

GENESIS XXXII. 29.

And he blessed him there.

JACOB now receives the blessing on the very spot on which he had been obliged to wrestle. We will consider this a little more minutely.

Israel had entreated a blessing, and that with a fervour and resolution which would take no refusal: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This was the Lord's own work in the soul of his servant. It was a prayer according to his will; and "if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." This prayer flowed from a profound and vital feeling, from a heartfelt consciousness of the necessity of a superior communication of grace. It was a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, which Jesus pronounces blessed, on account of the satisfaction attendant upon it, and to which the latter is secured.

What was it that Jacob particularly desired in imploring a blessing? He had already a sufficiency of earthly wealth; and in spiritual things he probably did not regard himself as one who has no part in the Divine blessing, and who is not an

object of the good pleasure and love of God ; by no means. He intended by it, *first*, a confirmation of the blessing received from his father, in virtue of which he was to be the progenitor of the promised Saviour of the world. This is proved by his high esteem and love for the Redeemer. Esau, his brother, might have had the first claim to it, on account of his being the first-born ; but he thought so little of the Redeemer, that he sold his birth-right, with all its privileges, for a mess of pottage ;—a figure of all those who esteem temporal blessings, and sensible and sinful delights, more highly than the favour of God. Esau obtained what he sought—earthly prosperity ; and in this respect far exceeded Jacob. The latter had only a sufficient number of servants, whilst Esau could take the field with four hundred armed men ; which was at that time a great number. The children of Esau were immediately termed princes (chap. xxxvi.), and they were numerous. Two of them were called Eliphaz and Teman ; and as these names were applied to Job's friends, it is evident that they were the descendants of Esau. As they make no mention whatever of the Redeemer in their discourses with Job—to

whom the latter bears such an excellent testimony, and who is also mentioned by Elihu—we justly conclude that Esau troubled himself little about it, and that his descendants followed in his steps; who, in the case of Job, only regarded temporal prosperity as a sign of Divine favour, and the being deprived of it as a proof of the Divine displeasure; and hence declared Job to be an ungodly man, by which they at the same time proved their own righteousness; according to which they regarded their temporal prosperity as a reward of their virtue, and inferred from Job's affliction, that he possessed no virtue. They were hirelings; hence the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is kindled against thee and thy two friends, for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath:" "My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept; lest I deal with you after your folly." If before, they would only hear of their own righteousness, and not of a Mediator, they were now obliged to be content to accept of Job's mediation, and hear that the Divine displeasure was kindled against them, notwithstanding their great wisdom and virtue, in which they thought

they so much excelled Job ; and they were in great danger of experiencing the most painful proofs of it. God regarded all their boasted wisdom as folly, however much they had said that was true and excellent ; and testified, respecting his servant Job, whose whole wisdom was at last comprised in this single expression, " I know that my Redeemer liveth ; " notwithstanding all he had uttered in his haste, " Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath." We must hope that in this manner, their own wisdom and righteousness were in mercy put to shame, and that they learnt with Job to comfort themselves with a Redeemer, and with Elihu to look unto the One of a thousand, who says, " Deliver him from going down to the pit."

Esau and his posterity soon established themselves in Mount Seir, and had already kings of their own, whilst Israel's descendants were still in circumstances of difficulty ; as a proof that the Divine favour and temporal sufferings may not only well exist together, but that the cross generally accompanies grace, and that those are not necessarily the children of God, with whom every thing succeeds according to their wish.

Jacob called his life a pilgrimage, and thus proved that he sought a country beyond the limits of the visible world. He gladly chose Christ, even with the cross ; which mind was afterwards manifested very gloriously in Moses, that true Israelite, when he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season !

But what ideas must Esau have had of the blessing of God, on comparing himself with Jacob ? The latter called him ' his Lord,' and himself his ' servant.' And such it really seemed, according to outward appearance. ' Ah,' may Esau have thought, ' what a superstitious fool I was, to attach so much value to my father's blessing, as to weep because my brother forestalled me in it ! How little reason I had for doing so ! How every thing succeeds according to my wish ! And my brother, how does it fare with him and his blessing ? It is only superstition. And according to reason, he was in the right. But did Jacob think so too ? Did he think, ' What am I profited in being preferred to Esau ? Wherein consists my preference ? In suffering, in persecution, in misfortune ? ' Did he think, ' The blessing

was of no importance, and it was very unnecessary for my mother to have been so anxious to appropriate it to me?" O no! His Redeemer was his treasure, which he would not exchange for any consideration. He regarded all he possessed as a gracious present of the good pleasure of God; and this made the little more precious to him, than the abundance which Esau possessed, and respecting which, it was doubtful whether he possessed it in wrath or from favour. David preferred spending a day in the courts of God's house, to a thousand in the tabernacles of the ungodly.

Israel desired the confirmation of the promised blessing, by which, according to the assurance given to his predecessor Abraham, all the nations of the earth should be blessed in his seed. This he preferred to every thing else; and that justly. "I have enough," said Esau; but Jacob, "I have abundance; for whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. Though flesh and heart fail, yet God is the strength of my heart, and my portion." This confirmation was Israel's primary wish.

The *second* thing of which he was rendered

desirous, was a deeper establishment in grace, greater liberty in it, a greater facility in boldly resigning and committing himself to it, by which he might be divested of a multitude of anxious cares. He had received the blessing from his father; he had experienced repeated confirmations of it from the Lord; he had received glorious promises, and the most striking proofs of his kind providence and goodness; but all this had not produced the effect upon his state of mind, befitting such gracious intimations. He was still subject to much anxiety and fear respecting Esau. One would be inclined to think and say, 'How is it possible, that with such marks of favour, and after such experience, he could still be apprehensive that Esau might slay him, together with his children, since the promise of God would then be rendered void?' Jacob was fully sensible how painful and unbecoming this was, without being able to alter it; and felt compelled to apply to God in prayer, that, together with the promise, he would grant him the ability duly to co-operate with it.

Such is also frequently the case with the Christian. After having been so often enabled to receive the promise of the Gospel, and Jesus

Christ himself, with joyful confidence, and to swear, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;" after having been a hundred times translated from darkness to light, and from pressure into peace; after having been most firmly assured of his having been received into favour, and frequently inundated with consolation, and been so often able to trust in the Lord, that he will surely perform what he has promised, he becomes in some measure ashamed of always doubting of his reception to favour, as he did at the beginning; yet still he possesses no real peace and rest for his soul, and cannot yet fully commit himself, with filial confidence and resignation, to God, and all his concerns to the Lord, and still feels occasionally fear and anxiety. There are many, indeed, who think it cannot be otherwise here below; and that every one must satisfy himself with it as well as he is able. There are also others who have a superior idea of grace. They know, beyond a doubt, that grace is more powerful than sin; that the heart may be established with grace; that the knowledge of Jesus Christ may be exceedingly abundant, so as to cause us to count all things but loss for it; that the

law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus may make us free from the law of sin and death; that we may be purged from an evil conscience, and that we may find rest for our souls; that from being children we may become men and fathers in Christ, and that our hearts may be knit together in love, unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In short, the individual is compelled to form no mean, but great ideas of a really evangelical and New Testament state of grace, with respect to enlightening peace, sanctification, and power, as is only just and reasonable. And not only so, but he also feels a powerful hunger and thirst after righteousness—after this perfect liberty, faith, and love; and finds himself compelled to declare with Jacob, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

It is therefore no longer single, transient enlightenings and seasons of refreshment which he desires, but a dwelling and abiding of Christ in the heart, a walking before him and in him, and a being rooted in him. Be it that the

soul is not clearly conscious of this ; yet still there is an impelling principle of the Spirit of God within her, which desires, with David, to be translated out of a strait place into a large room. Thus it manifested itself also in the disciples, when they prayed, " Lord, increase our faith ! " " Lord, teach us how to pray ! " because they could no longer be satisfied with their former mode of believing and praying. " Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us," said they ; and Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit, who should satisfy all their desire. Paul was not satisfied with the believing Corinthians, but calls them babes and carnal ; nor with the Hebrew Christians, " for when for the time they ought to have been teachers, they needed that one should teach them again, which were the first principles of the oracles of God." He says to the Galatians, that he must travail again in birth with them, until Christ be formed in them. Christ reproves his disciples for being so devoid of understanding ; and Peter says, " Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

No one, however, can add one cubit to his stature, nor make a hair white or black. With

out Jesus, believers can do nothing, not even think any thing good. It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do that which is well pleasing to him. Our nature is never to be trusted, however pious it may appear to be, and then even the least of all; for from motives of mere self-love and self-complacency it may seek to grow and be something superior; hence also it is said, "Mind not high things." We ought not to take pleasure in ourselves. Our self-love is shrewd enough to take pleasure in making a display of gifts, grace, and a lofty standing, to regard them as a prey, and to let itself be seen by others in such array. It will gladly pass with Simon the sorcerer for some great one. This desire to become something may be the motive for much labour, effort, and diligence, in things which in themselves are holy and good; and a long time may elapse before the individual himself perceives it. We may be, or seek to be, superior Christians in our own eyes or those of others, and yet it may all be nothing; for what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. But the gracious path he takes, is always that of bringing to nought that which is, in order that he may be all in all.

When was Jacob blest? When did he receive the new and glorious name? When was he commended? Only after the wondrous conflict. And what occurred in the latter? Did he become increasingly stronger? Thus we naturally imagine it; and, according to our opinion, such is the mode of procedure. First, the individual succumbs under the power of his adversaries; he then begins to struggle; whilst doing so, he increases in strength; at length he rises up, and treads his foe beneath his feet. Such is the idea reason forms of it. But with Israel, the case was entirely reversed. He begun the contest with his whole strength; which however gradually decreased; at length it entirely disappeared when his hip was dislocated. The conflict did not indeed cease then, but was changed into an entirely different method of warfare, which consisted in his throwing himself upon the neck of his opponent, who now became his only support. And the very moment when his strength forsook him, his wondrous antagonist saw that he could not prevail over Jacob, and declared himself vanquished. This is extremely strange; but the ways of the Lord are right. Thus the Lord continues to annih-

late that in his children which is, that he may be all in all.

On the whole, we must recollect, that real, genuine religion consists in a very essential experience of sin and grace, of our own misery and God's glory, of our own weakness and God's strength, of our own blindness and God's wisdom; and remember, at the same time, that in reality we understand nothing more of it than what we experience. We must learn to know that God has interwoven the cross into all his providential dealings, and that the old man gradually bleeds to death upon it under them. The Scriptures speak of a salutary crucifixion and a dying with Christ, as well as a rising and being made alive again with him. Even as the latter is something very sacred and glorious—so the former, on the contrary, like every other mode of being put to death, cannot take place without anxiety and distress, as little as Jacob's conflict could be carried on without pain and tears. Before Israel was delivered out of Egypt, their distress had reached its height; and Paul always bore about with him the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Christ might also be manifested in him.

When the disciples were about to be elevated to a higher state of grace, enlightening faith, and sanctification, their souls fell previously into great spiritual travail at the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, in which they wept and mourned. It is extremely easy to talk of religious subjects and exalted states, and self-love can take great pleasure in so doing. But where essential grace exists, there all that is mere talk infallibly ceases; because all foundation for it is taken away, and if the individual be inclined to glory, it must be in his weakness. "I thank thee that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me and helped me." A life of believing dependence, in which the individual boasts only of the Lord, is in truth and reality a rare phenomena.

Now if the Lord has wrought in a soul an ardent hunger after a genuine state of grace, he conducts it thither in the way which is best pleasing to him; and, by means which his manifold wisdom selects for the purpose—means and ways which mostly seem to Reason any thing else than suitable, and appear to her even the very reverse. For they are in conformity to the saying, "He that humbleth him-

self shall be exalted." Reason, which is blind, in the ways of God, hopes to become increasingly richer and stronger in itself, and to require less and less the help of the Lord. But it is just the contrary ! Christ increasingly becomes the one and the all, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last ; so that out of him, we can neither believe nor love, neither think nor desire anything good, neither hope nor be patient ; and yet we are able to do all this, and even more, through Christ which strengtheneth us. Thus Jacob also, in the end, could neither stand nor walk. And it is then that praying without ceasing becomes easy to us, and that all that is necessary to life and to godliness is given without ceasing to us, and that the Christian has nothing, yet possesses all things, is weak and yet strong, is nothing, and hence is able to do all things.

The Lord blessed Jacob. This was an actual reply to Israel's question, " Tell me, I pray thee, What is thy name ? " The Patriarch experienced it internally. His former fear departed from his soul, like the dawning of the day expels the shades of night. Even as by its pleasing light the refreshing dew descends

upon the grass—so a heavenly peace descended soothingly into the distressed soul of the weary Patriarch. The wild animals retired into their caves, and instead of their horrifying roar, the birds of heaven chanted their morning hymn, and Jacob's terrific idea of ruin and destruction dissolved into confident hope. The thought of threatening Esau and his four hundred men, no longer terrified him; he was overcome; and Jacob, more defenceless than yesterday, was to-day, although lame, as bold as a young lion. He no longer needed to look at the armed host. He knew in whom he believed, though Esau were to march against him with four thousand instead of four hundred men. His heart was enlarged in peaceful confidence in his God,

Thus the Lord blessed him, not in word, but by an essential impartation of his inward grace, which far exceeds all reason.

O glorious communication, more precious than if his mind had been refreshed by words, and literal promises, the effect of which is seldom wont to be of long duration! O what mercy, when it is not single alleviations that are vouchsafed to us, and which are soon fol-

lowed by new distresses ; but when it is given us to “ come up out of the wilderness like pillars of perfume,” and to lean upon our beloved ; and when it is said, ‘ How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince’s daughter ! ’ What mercy, when it is granted us in future to act in a becoming manner towards the Friend of our souls, and to come boldly to the mercy seat ; quietly to walk forwards in the profoundest poverty of Spirit, in genuine sincerity and complete faith ; and when our state is like that of the Apostle, described in the words, “ I am crucified with Christ. Now I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

In this blessing, everything is comprehended which is requisite for our commencement and progress, and our awakening and deeper establishment ;—in a word, the essential appropriation, by the Holy Spirit, of the blessings of salvation purchased by Christ, and the Holy Spirit himself. When Jesus, at the close of his residence on earth, and as a pre-intimation of

his employment in heaven, lifted up his hands, and blessed his disciples, they no longer hid themselves behind closed doors from fear of the Jews ; they began to praise and give thanks ; they assembled together openly of one accord in the temple, for prayer and supplication. Thus the Lord first awakened in the mind of the Patriarch an urgent craving after the blessing, so that he could affirm and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." The Lord then let him wait awhile, that he might be the more profoundly conscious, that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy ; and in order that he might be the more completely emptied of all his own activity : and then he blessed him there, on the very spot where he had been obliged to wrestle. Hence the place became very memorable to him, and he called it Peniel—the face of God.

It was indeed worth the while ; for such a blessing is everything. In earthly things, it causes the seed to grow, the fruit of the vine not to deceive the hope, business to succeed, and prevents loss and injury ; for the race is

not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ; ability is not sufficient for the procuring of a maintenance, nor prudence for the acquisition of wealth. If the Lord do not build the house, they labour in vain that build it ; unless the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain. It is in vain to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows ; for he giveth it his beloved sleeping. In vain thou weariest thyself in the multitude of thy ways, and takest thought in vain to add one cubit to thy stature. But the Lord's blessing maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it : everything then comes as of itself. " Bless me also," cried Esau, and yet did not obtain the blessing ; as a proof that even the earnest and real longing after the blessing is the Lord's work in the soul. Ah, Esau the elder still seeks to have the blessing, and to be something great and powerful ; seeks to compel God to regulate the way of salvation according as he thinks best, and to be righteous and perfect in himself. But in this he will never succeed ; he will not obtain the blessing, however much he may murmur and complain. The less, the younger, the

new man receives it, but only when the hip of self is dislocated, when it is at length said to him, "I have chosen thee, thou art mine."

To Him be the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever ! Amen.

SERMON XI.

It was an unparalleled, wonderful, and incredible method, in reference to which it is impossible to find language sufficiently glorifying to God, that king Jehoshaphat employed, when he went forth to war, and gained the victory ; on which occasion it pleased God to manifest his glory in such an extremely striking manner, as we read in 2 Chron. xx.

In the enemy's great superiority of power, which constrained Jehoshaphat to confess and say, "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us ;" and which placed him in such a dilemma that he exclaimed, "Neither know we what to do ;" and which urged him to call upon God, saying, "Our eyes are upon thee ;" we see, at the same time, the object of all the afflictions through which we

are called to pass. We are by them to be rendered lowly, little, nothing, impotent, and helpless, and to give God the glory; even as Jehoshaphat said, "Wilt thou not judge them?" How desirable, that we should also be brought, from heartfelt conviction, to say, "We have no might;" and be enabled at the same time to lift up our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our help. How admirable is the power of faith! Its basis is the promise, "Thus saith the Lord." Its object is God: "The battle is not yours, but God's." Its effect is peace and composure: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord, who is with you!" It also produces deep humility. The king prostrates himself with his whole people. It excites to thanksgiving and praise, and the ground of thankfulness is this, "His mercy endureth for ever." It terminates in complete victory. Behold what power God can give to those, in whom there is no might, and who know not what they ought to do. He can enable them still to believe in the Lord, and to feel safe, when everything appears against them; and can cause them to thank and praise

“with a loud voice on high,” not merely after having obtained the victory, but even before the commencement of the fight ; for the Lord is wonderful in his believing people, and glorious in his saints.

Oh, if we could only believe, and do nothing else but believe ! For all things are possible to him that believeth. But this is only learnt in those paths in which Jehoshaphat learned it : “Not in us, but in thy hand is the might and the power.” In this manner the Patriarch Jacob also learned it.

GENESIS XXXII. 30, 31.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel ; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel, the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

THE Lord had blessed Jacob ; therefore he now let him go. He inwardly felt, that though the Lord might visibly disappear from him, yet he remained with him and in him. Such was

also the case with the disciples at the ascension of Jesus. He departed from them bodily, but spiritually and essentially he remained with them, and continues with us even to the end of the world. And of this we are conscious from his Spirit, which he hath given us ; and from the peace, joy, and power, which operate in us.

The whole affair with Jacob deserved a memorial. He instituted this, by giving a new name to the place where this remarkable event occurred. Nature presented him with an emblem of it—the rising sun ; and he had a memento of it in his own body—he was lame.

The Son of God had given Jacob a new name. The Patriarch could not apply a new name to God in return, since his goodness is every morning new, ever alike fresh and lovely. He therefore gave the place a new and suitable name, by calling it Peniel—that is, the face of God. He explained what he meant by this new name, by adding, “ I have seen God face to face ;” and the effect of this was, “ My life is preserved.” But God himself instituted a memorial of the event, which shall last as long as the world stands, by causing it to be recorded

by His servant Moses, and to be called to mind by the Prophet Hosea. But what am I saying ? —as long as the world stands ? To all eternity will Jacob himself be a memorial of this event ; and even as he was so here by his lameness, so he will be there by his glory.

Peniel. This world possesses many uncommonly glorious places. The natural man finds those the most remarkable, where Nature manifests herself in peculiar splendour and majesty ; where lofty mountains yield delightful prospects, and smiling plains exhibit the blessings of heaven ; where majestic rivers roll along, or the wide ocean expands itself like an eternity before the eye, which seeks in vain its limit. The scientific man lingers with pleasure on the monuments of ancient and modern art ; he gazes with admiration at the enormous dome which ancient times reared heavenwards, or is ravished with the productions of the painter or the statuary, which animate, as it were, the lifeless canvas and the solid marble. He admires the magnificence and beauty of princely palaces, and lingers astonished at the works of art. The historian loses himself in reflection, when visiting the scene of former important events,

when coming in sight of ancient Rome, with all its reminiscences ; or when upon a field, where memorable battles have been fought. Who, at this present period, does not think with admiration of Wittenberg, and its royal chapel ; of the Wartburg, of Zurich and Geneva, and of the names of Luther, Zuinglius, and Calvin, because they remind us of a multiplicity of events connected with them ?

The Christian has also his memorable spots and places in the world ; Bethlehem, Capernaum, Jerusalem, Calvary, and the Mount of Olives, are these remarkable spots. Formerly they were personally visited by the piously superstitious pilgrim, whilst his heart, perhaps, was far from God. His bodily eye saw the remarkable places, whilst the eye of his Spirit remained closed against the wonders which there took place for the salvation of sinners. His feet wandered in what is called the Holy Land, where Abraham once sojourned ; which the Son of God touched with his sacred feet, and even with his face ; which he bedewed with his tears, his bloody sweat, and his atoning blood ; in which his lifeless body slumbered three days, and where he again rose to heaven from

whence he had come down. There the foot of many a pilgrim wanders, whilst it is not given him to walk in the steps of faithful Abraham, and to know the way of peace—nay, whilst rejecting the Son of God, by thinking to render his own works effectual as an atonement for his sins. These places are Peniels to believers, revelations of the glory of God, since his faith and love find the pastures of eternal life in that which there took place. And has not every Christian his particular Peniels, in which God revealed himself to him in an especial manner?—his closet, a sermon, a book, a company, a solitary hour, and the like, which continue ever memorable to him.

Jacob called this remarkable place Peniel—not as a memorial of himself, nor of that which he had there performed and accomplished; but of that which he had apprehended and experienced of God, and of the gracious benefit bestowed upon him. You see here the character of all God's children. The world is proud, and boasts that she has done this or accomplished that; she desires to be regarded and commended for it, and to be honoured for zeal, prudence, and ability. Her own glory is her

aim, and the being denied it her most sensible mortification. Like the Pharisee in the Gospel, she ascribes it to herself, that she is not this and that, and that she is and does the other ; she will not give her glory to another, and feels much offended if any one seeks to possess it in her stead. Even when the Son of God says, " Without me ye can do nothing," he has only contradiction to expect from her ; and when Paul says, " Not of yourselves, it is the gift of God," the proud world is insulted by it. The Lord knows how to produce a different effect in his children, even though he be obliged to deprive them of their strength. ~~He does so,~~ in order that if any one will glory, he may glory in his weakness, and in the Lord ; and that all glorying in himself, may cease and perish.

Jacob gives the reason for the appellation of this place in the words, " For I have seen God, face to face." Here we find a complete explanation who it was who wrestled with Jacob, dislocated his thigh, gave him a new name, and blessed him. It was not a mere angel. With these Jacob was well acquainted. During his flight from his brother, when sleeping solitarily

in a wilderness upon the earth, with a stone under his head for a pillow, he saw in a dream the angels of God ascending and descending upon a ladder, on the top of which stood the Lord himself; on his return, he was again met by two hosts of angels, and he called the place where this occurred, Mahanaim. Here, however, it was no created angel, but God himself—that person in the Divine Being, who is called the Messiah, “the sent of God,” Jesus Christ, who in the fulness of time was really manifested in flesh and blood. If we ask, by what it was that Jacob perceived with such certainty that it was a *Divine* person with whom he had to do, we answer, He was assured of it in the same mysterious manner as the weeping Magdalen at the sepulchre was assured by the single word, ‘Mary!’ that it was not the gardener, but Jesus himself, who was conversing with her; and as the disciples on the sea of Tiberias were so perfectly convinced it was the Lord, that none of them needed to ask him, “Who art thou?” “The Spirit beareth witness that the Spirit is truth” (1 John v. 6). The Christian’s conviction is something peculiar. It is a consciousness that it is really so, a certain confi-

dence which does not and cannot doubt ; whilst, on the contrary, a mere human belief thinks, it may be so, or may be otherwise.

Jacob now said, " I have seen God face to face." Paul calls God, " The Invisible" (1 Tim. i. 17) ; and in ch. vi. 16, he says, " God dwelleth in a light, which no man can approach unto ; whom no man hath seen, or can see." Still, we read in Exod. xxiv. 9, 10, that Aaron and his sons, and the seventy elders of Israel, were ordered to ascend Mount Sinai, and worship afar off. But Moses alone drew near to the Lord. And when they went up (ver. 10) " They saw the God of Israel ; and there was under his feet, as it were, a paved work of a sapphire stone (which is azure, with golden spots), and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness." Isaiah also saw the Lord " sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (chap. vi.) ; and he whom he saw was Jesus Christ, as we see from John xii. 41.

The people of Israel sinned by idolatry, soon after the giving of the law. When Moses came down from the Mount, and saw and heard with what tumultuous joy the people

worshipped the golden calf, he dashed in pieces, in his anger, the two tables of the law, which he had brought with him from Mount Sinai, and on which God himself had written the commandments; he was particularly irritated against his brother Aaron, who had made the calf; but to the people he said, "Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin." He ascended the Mount, and said, "O Lord, this people have sinned a great sin; yet now, forgive their sin; but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written." 'What?' answered the Lord, whoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Lead the people unto the place, of which I have spoken unto thee; behold mine angel shall go before thee. I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people, lest I consume thee in the way." This did not please Moses, and he humbly interceded once more; and as God for some time had only called the children of Israel "the people," Moses said, "consider that this nation is thy people;" and the Lord then declared, saying, "My

presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Moses eagerly caught at this, and said, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known that I and thy people have found favour in thy sight, except thou goest with us? And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken, for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name." This emboldened Moses so much, that he said, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory?" The Lord answered, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. But thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live. But thou shalt see my back-parts." And thus Moses beheld the glory of the Lord from behind, and the face of Moses shone in consequence, so that the children of Israel could not look at him without a veil.

Jacob also said, "I have seen God face to face." But in reality he only saw the human form which the Lord had assumed for a season. In the fulness of time, he took upon him our

nature, in personal union with his Divine. The infinite surrounded himself with bounds, and the invisible became visible—God became man. Without controversy, great is the mystery. With what rapture shall all his elect eventually behold him, be like him, and see him as he is! “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

But even here below there is a seeing God in grace, in a spiritual manner, and superior to sense.

The earth, the sky with its splendid and majestic lights, the beauty of the spring, the blossoming trees, the waving corn-fields, the rolling of the thunder in the clouds, the genial dew—all remind us of an overruling providence. But Job at length says, after the Lord had taught him from a whirlwind, “I formerly heard of thee with the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee;” and the consequence was, “Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Hence the knowledge that Job obtained after his affliction was more profound and perfect than before; even as we receive a much clearer idea of a thing, which we see with our eyes, than by merely hearing of it.

Such was also the case with Jacob. Distinguished light had risen upon him by means of this conflict, such as he had never possessed before. He became much more intimately acquainted with his God than previously; even as when we see the face of some one whom we had only known before from report. Now if it be eternal life to know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; if life consist in righteousness, peace, and joy, he had evidently increased in all these in a remarkable manner: Christ in the struggle, had become more perfectly formed within him, although painful distress had preceded it. "In thy light we see light," says David, and prays: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." He also confesses that the law of the Lord is perfect, rejoicing the heart, and making wise the simple. But Peter says, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Now this is not accomplished by reflection, studying, and reading; by these the head may indeed be filled with orthodox thoughts and ideas; but this, as Paul says, is only "the form of sound words." It is like undigested food, which may indeed puff up, but

cannot strengthen or nourish. Hence the same Apostle says, "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth." The instruction which Jesus imparts, is given us by the Holy Spirit on the path of experience, by means of a variety of providential dispensations, afflictions, consolations, impartations and privations, disturbance and peace, strength and weakness. Thus he teaches sinners in the way, he guides the meek aright, and teacheth the humble his way. It is thus that he instructs them respecting sin and grace, until with Job they are able to renounce themselves entirely, and give God all the glory; the path which was rugged before, then becomes straight and even.

Jacob then also mentions the effect of this seeing God, and adds, "My life is preserved."

He was delivered. His former state was an oppressive one—fightings without, and fears within. Esau with his four hundred men terrified him. His faith was weak; his courage small; joy had departed from his soul, and clouds of sorrow darkened his mind, which vented themselves in tears. That night had been the most painful and distressing one he had ever spent; he saw nothing but death before him,

which Esau had sworn concerning him, and he knew that he was not to be trifled with. It seemed as if God himself had given him over unto death, when he commanded him to return out of Mesopotamia. He had recourse by prayer to that God, who had hitherto blessed and protected him, in order to pour out his fears and his distress before him, and to entreat his deliverance. He knew not by what means he would help him. But what befel him during prayer? We know already. A man struggled with him in such a manner as to dislocate his thigh.

Thus the Lord exercises his people by a variety of afflictions; not unfrequently in such a manner as to cause them to think they must despair and perish, and really would do so, did not the Lord sustain them, in a faithful and confident manner, although imperceptible to themselves; nay, to say the truth, they really do perish and despair—that is, with reference to themselves; so that, on their part, they are compelled to exclaim, “We perish!” and are deprived of the power to believe, love, and hope; even as Jacob was not only stripped of the ability to defend himself, but also even to flee.

Such situations are, indeed, no pastime; as Jacob also found it. But the end of the ways of God is better than their beginning: exaltation follows humiliation, and life follows death.

Thus it proved also in Jacob's case. "My life is preserved," said he. He now felt very different. He was like the eagle, who renews his youth, whose feathers grow again, so that he can again elevate himself upon his pinions and soar aloft to hover in the rays of the sun. His confidence in God was quickened, and his whole soul was tranquillized so that he could boldly look around him. Fear had departed, and he was enabled confidently to appear before Esau. He had all, and abounded.

Such a pleasing reverse is promised in numberless passages: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you;" "I will comfort thee as a mother comforteth her child;" "I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness;" and many more such promises. They are also faithfully fulfilled in all those whom the Lord humbles; and hence, it is said, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that

he may exalt you in due time." My heart rejoices at thy willingness to help. "I will praise the Lord for his mercies towards me. He hath preserved my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, and forget not all his benefits!" Thus the same David rejoiced, who had uttered so many complaints. Thus many a child of God is able to rejoice; and what exultation, and blessing, and praise will there be, when they shall arrive in heaven out of all their tribulation, after having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!

But what praise to the glory of Divine grace is excited, even here below, in those favoured souls who can exult with David, and say, "The Lord hath delivered me from all my fears;" who possess peace in the Lord in an uniform and permanent manner, although in the world they may have tribulation; and who have attained the great grace of being able to rejoice in the Lord always, and to exclaim in the spirit of adoption, "Abba, father!" O happy souls, who

are redeemed from the servile spirit of bondage, delivered from the fear of death, made free by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, from the law of sin ; and who serve God, not according to the letter, but in the Spirit. These are the glorious results of beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

If we wish to enter into the full meaning of Jacob's expression, we must remember that he really expressed himself in his language as follows :—‘ I am preserved, and shall be preserved ;’ so that he was animated by a vigorous confidence with respect to the future. The Lord had said to him, “ Thou hast had power ;” or more correctly speaking, “ Thou wilt be enabled to prevail.” Now, here is the echo of faith : ‘ I am preserved, and shall be preserved ! although new tribulations may befall me, according to the will of God ; yet, I shall be preserved, and at length he will deliver me from all evil, and bring me to his glorious kingdom ; of this I am assured, for I know in whom I have believed.’

God performs what he promises. He faithfully helped Jacob through everything, although

he had to experience many grievous trials ; one of the most painful of which was, the supposed death of his favourite son, Joseph, whom he was told a wild beast had devoured, on his being sent out by him ; respecting which he doubtless reproached himself bitterly, as having committed a great piece of thoughtlessness, and on whose account he mourned long, until this also cleared itself up in an unexpected and glorious manner. Whether Jacob, under all these circumstances, was able with the same serenity to say, " I shall be preserved," I know not. From his long mourning over Joseph, and his declaration, " that if mischief befel Benjamin by the way, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave," the contrary may be inferred ; as also from his exaggerated statements to his sons, who wished to take Benjamin with them into Egypt. " Me ye have bereaved of my children," said he ; " Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away ; all these things are against me." And when his sons, on a previous occasion, had committed the shameful murder of the Shechemites, he was again afraid, and said,

“ I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me, and slay me, and I shall be destroyed, and mine house.” Where is now thy faith ? it might be asked. But this also tends much to the glory of God, and to prove that he is alone good, and that we without him can do nothing. In the joy of his heart, and in the enjoyment of Divine gifts, the man probably imagines that his mountain stands so strong, that he will never be moved. And why does he suppose so ? Because he secretly thinks that he himself has become something, and imagines he is in possession of the faith &c., for which he has so long supplicated. But it may still be the case with him, that like Jacob he looks at himself, and is afraid lest his powerful foes should at length destroy him and his whole house. O how much has God to do with us, in order to bring us into true poverty of spirit, and to keep us in it ! We are invariably desirous of becoming something in ourselves—of growing, being strong, and able in ourselves. Hence the Lord is continually obliged to convince us of our poverty and misery ; yet all this would avail nothing, if he did

not himself enable some souls to ascribe to him the kingdom, the power, and the glory ; and to regard themselves in truth and reality as nothing, even in the possession of abundance of gifts ; and at the same time to believe in reality and with serenity, and to be satisfied that in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. It is true indeed, that no one can receive anything, or retain it, except it be given him from above.

The sun now rose. This splendid spectacle in nature was also an image of that which had passed in the soul of the Patriarch. The night had disappeared. A lovely morning dawned. It rose upon him. The Sun of righteousness and the Dayspring from on high, was at length to arise upon them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace. O may this sun rise ; may it rise upon us with its healing beams ; may it rise upon all who call themselves Christians—upon the posterity of Israel—upon the whole world !

And Jacob halted upon his thigh. Every step reminded him of the great mercy of the

Lord, and at the same time of his own nothingness. Every step exalted and humbled him. And when others heard his name and saw his lameness, they would also be reminded that the Lord condescends more graciously to his people, than it might be supposed. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

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